ABSTRACT

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Title: Military Retirement Transition as Learning

Major: Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon that describes how military retirees transition from the military to civilian society suggests a high degree of learning occurs during the experience. The study was based on three research questions. The purpose of the first research question was to (1) describe how military retirees experienced the transition. The purpose of the second research question was to (2) determine how the transition effected the military retirees' beliefs, values, and knowledge about work. Finally, purpose of the third research question was to (3) identify what learning strategies are formulated and applied to enable transition success. The current study was designed to determine the stages of transition relative to the military-civilian transition process.

There were 13 military retirees who volunteered to participate in the study. Each participant participated in one or more interviews. All of the interviews were used as data to complete the study.

The interviews along with the interview notes and other pertinent military documentation were collected and reviewed and then subjected to a process of constant comparison against the research questions and interview notes to determine the main themes that contained the findings of the study. These were identified as Leaving it Behind, Rethinking Work, and Learning Strategies.

From those themes, the research concluded that career salience or the value attached to work by individuals, formal and nonformal learning in the form of military experience, further education, and negative role models played key roles in the successful transition experience of the participants.

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

MILITARY RETIREMENT TRANSITION AS LEARNING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING, ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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DEKALB, ILLINOIS

MAY 2007

Certification: In accordance with departmental and Graduate School policies, this dissertation is accepted in partial fulfillment of degree requirements.

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5/12/07

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to express my deepest appreciation to Professor Amy Rose for her leadership, patience, and wisdom in the preparation of this manuscript as dissertation chair. In addition the author also wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Professors Fran Giordano and Lisa Baumgartner for their assistance and counsel in their role as my dissertation committee, as well as Dr. Bob Mason for his great encouragement and guidance as my original dissertation chair. I also want to express my gratitude to Donna Smith for her help as my editor.

DEDICATION

To Ronnie, my devoted wife and friend, with deepest love and gratitude for partnering and persevering with me through it all

To Ruby Lee, my beloved mother, with love and gratitude for never doubting me

To Matthew and Joshua, my wonderful sons, with love and gratitude for allowing me to borrow time from them

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PREFACE

I was born in Chicago, Illinois. When I was four years old, we moved to Markham, Illinois, a suburb located approximately 20 miles south of Chicago. I grew up in a two-parent household with one older sister and three younger brothers. In our lower-middle-class neighborhood, we were seen by others as well-to-do. We never really lacked for anything. From the beginning, there was an emphasis on learning and I excelled throughout elementary school. High school brought different experiences and I sampled them all. As a result my grades suffered and ultimately I lost out on a college basketball scholarship to the school of my choice. As a fallback, I took a partial football scholarship to a very small, central Illinois college. I lasted a little more than a semester, as personal setbacks and a failure to apply myself to my studies combined to overwhelm me.

Shortly after, I found out what I did not want to do with my life. A well-paying job at a steel mill brought with it long, hard hours. As I looked at my older coworkers, many with families, I could not imagine the drudgery of working at the steel mill for the rest of my years. I decided to join the Navy to give myself some time to figure out what I wanted and to take advantage of the G.I. Bill.

After serving on active duty for three years, I left the Navy and briefly worked at a hospital before enrolling in college full time. As a reservist I still had to

attend meetings for two years and it was during my obligatory active duty while serving in Hawaii that I decided the Navy was the place for me and so I reenlisted. I went on to serve 17 more years and retired after serving for a total of 22 years.

The military was very good to me. During that time I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees and began work on my doctoral degree. Professionally, I also achieved a modicum of success through promotions and increasingly interesting and fulfilling responsibilities. Most memorable to me was earning the top academic award at the Senior Enlisted Academy, the "Top Gun" school for noncommissioned officers. It was also through the military that I met and married my wife, then in the Coast Guard. While we were both still in the military, we had two sons.

In the military I had a sense of belonging, a sense of achievement, a sense of self-confidence that led me to believe that I could succeed under any circumstances. Though it had been a major part of my life, the military to me really was preparation for the rest of my real life. Toward the end of my military career, I naturally became quite curious of the career paths of colleagues who preceded me into retirement. At first, I was most curious as to why and how they chose civilian careers. I quickly began to realize that many of my highly decorated and distinguished friends and colleagues experienced difficulty finding their niche in the civilian world. I was puzzled as to why individuals with more than 20 years of a career filled with leadership and management achievements would be unable to translate those accomplishments into a successful civilian career.

The more I investigated this phenomenon the more concerned I became. Two examples stand out and became the trigger events for my own transition. The first example involves a very intelligent, multitalented, and extremely articulate individual. There seemed to be no limit to what he was able to do while in the military. He was the go-to person in the command, a gifted problem solver, and he moved well among all levels of military personnel. It came as somewhat of a surprise that after the military, he bounced around from one mediocre career to another. Suddenly, an individual noted for his stability in the military seemingly demonstrated none at all in the civilian world.

The second example involves an individual who was very well admired by all and had a special talent for multitasking. He gave the impression there was no limit to the projects he could successfully complete. His career was marked by a wide variety of assignments which no doubt proved to be a big help in his ability to surmount any task given him. He also seemed to be a great family man, always appearing at military functions with his wife and kids.

Again, I was completely taken by surprise when not only his civilian career but his personal life took a wrong turn after his retirement. Despite his many achievements, he was only able to find work as a security guard at the local mall. At around the same time, his wife filed for divorce. Three to four years after his retirement, he was still struggling to survive.

To be honest, these incidents with individuals I personally knew and admired scared me. I was afraid that if they couldn't survive the transition, how could I

possibly make it? But at the same time it became a challenge and in the end that outweighed my fear. I was determined not to meet the same fate as my two friends. And so, while undertaking my own transition, I began this study both as a matter of curiosity as well as confirmation of making a successful military-to-civilian transition.

From a career standpoint, my initial civilian vocational aspiration was to continue my path in the human resources field. At first, everything went according to plan. Through a family referral, I began my civilian career as a human resources consultant at a Chicago hospital shortly before my official retirement from the military in September 1996. However, I remained in that position for less than a month before accepting a position with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois in downtown Chicago.

I was familiar with Blue Cross since I had worked there part-time for a year in the finance division as a supervisor in the contract processing department proceeding my retirement. In this position, I supervised a staff who made health insurance identification cards for new members. My intent was to get a feel for what it would be like in the civilian world.

A month after beginning work at the hospital I left to begin my new full-time position as a facilitator in the customer advocate department of the information technology group division of Blue Cross. In this position, I led meetings of up to 30 individuals from all areas of the company to define business requirements and develop and design solutions regarding information technology process problems.

After the design stage, my role was to serve as the project manager through implementation.

Working in the constantly changing world of information technology was exhilarating, but I felt underutilized. I wanted to work in an area that had impact for all aspects of the organization. So after six months, I moved to the finance division as a corporate planning and operations analyst. After three years I was promoted to manager of the department. The position required me to oversee and provide assistance and analysis to divisions regarding development of their annual plan regarding their goals and objectives. Additionally, I was the administrator for merger and acquisition activities as well as the facilitator of strategic planning sessions and I supervised the capital budget process and executive compensation programs. I derived great satisfaction in helping to set the strategic direction of the company.

It was an interesting and high-profile assignment. It made use of all my acquired skills in the military and college education. I had a chance to work with senior staff on high-level projects while also developing innovative solutions to complex problems. If someone had told me I would be working in this field three years ago, I would have been very surprised. Sometimes I missed the familiarity of the human resources field, but never really considered going back because of the different career path I seemed to be on at Blue Cross.

Ironically, after a corporate reorganization, I now find myself back in human resources and was promoted to a new role as the director of the planning and

program management office. Without a doubt, it has been a long, strange journey that I could not have foreseen. If this job had been offered to me upon retirement I would have jumped at it as my dream job. It is funny how things work out. I have learned a great deal about corporate America and how to survive and thrive in it.

There is no doubt in my mind that my past experiences prepared me for where I am now. What I wasn't prepared for were all the other changes in my life. Now for me it was as if the military had existed in a whole other time and place, which of course it did. In fact, the other life shifts inarguably have made the most profound impact on my life. In addition to my new career, I am actively involved in church and community activities. During my 22 years of service I only went to church probably five times.

So far I have become aware of a couple of things about myself. One is that I have a great capacity for change. Considering my many years in the military, this should not be surprising. I believed that after so many new jobs, locations, and policy changes, I had become somewhat jaded in that area. Now, I appreciate these skills so much more because the world I'm now in seems to struggle mightily with change. I've also learned to allow more room for serendipity and spontaneity in my life. The overall effect is I have become less studied in my world view and more willing to take advantage of or wait for the right opportunity rather than forcing a rigid blueprint upon my life.

My new life is more fulfilling and altogether different than I anything I could have planned or imagined for myself. I firmly believe I have grown significantly in

my personal and professional lives. In essence, I have become more of the man I envisioned myself to be in my hopes and dreams. All of this has led me to my study. I wondered if my case and my feelings were similar to others.

In developing the research questions, I thought back to an encounter with prospective military retirees while serving as a guest speaker during a retirement seminar. At that time I had worked for a month as a human resources consultant for a medium-sized hospital before accepting a position with Blue Cross. The question I'll never forget was, "What does a human resources consultant do?" After I answered the question along with some follow-up questions on the subject, I realized that what they really wanted to know was what I had learned from my own transition and how it translated into a career change. Primarily they sought to determine what the experience was like and how they might prepare themselves. Almost as important, after having been in the military so long, they also wanted to know what to expect and how they would fit into their new environment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which you yourself have altered."

Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*

Though the context is markedly different, perhaps no other quotation captures the essence of what it means to retire from the military and re-enter the civilian world as well as this South African leader's reflection. In a similar sense, the military retiree also returns to a world not quite like the one left behind 20 years or more before. Like Mandela, individuals who serve in the United States military have to make the transition from the military to civilian life upon retirement.

The goal for military retirees is to effectively establish new lives as civilians. No blueprint exists to help the retiring military veteran successfully navigate the transition. Military retirees are faced with the task of building new lives in a new culture with little to no guidance or assistance. While civilian career opportunities exist, there is not a clear line of sight to the next job. Having been out of the civilian mainstream for so long, military personnel have to learn not only how manage their departure from the military but how to plan their re-entry into the civilian world.

The Problem

To date, there have been many studies regarding adult transition, but none that sought to specifically understand how military retirees' learning occurred as part of the transition experience. Brown (2000) investigated the experience of three military retirees in an effort to ascertain the meaning of the transition from a life change perspective. Several other studies have focused on the career and life satisfaction of military retirees, but again, they did not specifically explicate the experiences of the transition from military to civilian life. For example, Brunson (1997) examined the correlation between career change and life satisfaction of military retirees who were alumni of military academies. The study focused mainly on the career patterns and occupational mobility of military officers to determine contentment levels.

Lloyd (1995) documented the propensity of military academy graduates to seek civilian positions similar to their military specialties. This research provides a valuable framework from which to further delve into the particular issues of midlife transition from a military perspective. For society as well as the retiring veteran, there are potential undesirable ramifications regarding the integration of military retirees into civilian life.

Through examination of how military retirees transition from the military to civilian society, this research aims to describe the process from the individual's point of view. In particular the three major topics of research will center on the military,

retirement, and transitions. Focusing exclusively on these three areas allows the research to fully explore the linkage and dynamic elements of the military-civilian transition.

Individuals who retire from the military are guaranteed government pensions for life but they are not assured of a professional career or successful lives afterward. Instead they have to determine how to translate their military experience into satisfying civilian careers and lives. Again, not a lot of research exists to show whether the military career helps or hinders one in the transition. An assumption could be made that a job as a torpedo mate in the military would not easily translate to a civilian career. By contrast, a hospital mate would seem to have an easier career transition because of the similarities to civilian medical careers, but no research exists to document either example.

This study looks at the elements of the military-civilian transition, including the physical as well as emotional and mental aspects involved in the process. Central to the study is the issue of careers. As such, the study provides valuable knowledge on how transitions are effected from a purely military perspective.

A few major assumptions of this study concerned employment of military retirees. The first assumption was that the research subjects would already be employed or cycled through several jobs. Another assumption was the likelihood that a number of highly qualified retirees will have been employed before their actual retirement date. This is not uncommon because the military's terminal leave,

including home and job hunting allowance policies, enable some veterans to utilize up to 90 days prior to their official retirement date to pursue new homes and careers.

Ideally, this study will produce information with far-reaching implications for future successful transition programs for all types and levels of organizations and adult education professionals. In addition to the purpose and arguments for research cited, the remainder of the study seeks to explore in detail theory relevant to learning and military transition from different vantages.

In making the transition from the military, veterans draw on skills developed both in and out of the military. To be sure, their road is certain to include bumps and detours as well as smooth highways. It is both a time of uncertainty and hope brought on by the possibilities of new opportunities.

In addition to the emotional satisfaction and tangible benefits culminating from long-time careers spent serving their country, military retirees must also confront uncertain futures regarding the rest of their lives. The concrete part of the transition process is probably more immediately evident in the search for a new professional career. After 20 years in an insular and ordered environment, retiring military personnel face acculturation and digestion into a relatively unfamiliar society. For some it represents a continuation of a similar career path while to others it presents the even more daunting prospect of forging an entirely new life.

A military career can be illustrated in three phases. Recruits new to the military culture learn time-honored military traditions and customs from how to salute to handling firearms correctly. Members then attend military specialty schools

before assignment to general duty (Department of Defense, 2001). Individuals develop and advance through further military training and voluntary off-duty education. In the military, adult education is an essential and recommended part of military life. Opportunities for growth abound through in-service and civilian education in a variety of areas.

The last stage is dominated by preparation for retirement. Education remains a vital part of the serviceperson's life, but is directed toward postmilitary prospects. In many cases, prospective military retirees spend this stage through independent or organized adult education to prepare for second careers. A significant portion and challenge for this study was to determine how the total military experience translated to civilian society.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify, describe, and understand how military retirees undergo the transition from military to civilian life. Further, the study will attempt to determine how the experience of the transition has influenced their values and beliefs, especially as they relate to work. Finally, an expectation of this study is to ascertain what types of strategies are learned as a way to move through the transition.

Ideally, this study will produce information with far-reaching implications for adult educators who work in a variety of transition programs. In addition to the purpose and arguments for research cited in the introduction and problem statement,

the remainder of the study seeks to explore in detail theory relevant to how individuals learn as they transition from military retirement to civilian careers. Finally, this study will add new knowledge to the body of literature on transitions made from military to civilian society.

While there is no simple description of the journey military retirees undertake, it would help to identify and track the development of emergent transition patterns to make the transition easier for others who follow similar paths. Rather than prescribe a simple formula for coping with retirement, the research's emphasis will be on evolving transitional learning processes through the pre- and post-retirement window.

What happens to those who change careers after 20 years or more in one profession? Specifically, what happens to them when they retire from the military? How do they choose new careers? Moreover, how did they feel as they went through the transition experience? Finally, what did they learn from the transition?

The body of research on transition provided much of the theoretical framework for this study. "A transition, broadly, is any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27). Further, Schlossberg (1984) identified retirements as anticipated transitions that occur in the context of work and have some degree of positive or negative impact on the individual's life. Both definitions suggest that the transition from military to civilian life requires some basic skills or methods to cross over to the other side.

Transitions are, for better or worse, a condition of life. They can be positive or negative or even have a negligible effect depending on the circumstances surrounding the particular situation. Transitions usually result in a change in a significant individual. Transitions are standard operating procedure in the military. Frequent job transfers involving changes of venue and duties to protect the global interests of our country combine to make change a normal part of military life.

What is uncertain is specifically how military retirees learn to cope with the transition to civilian life on a number of levels. Further complicating the transition experience, former military personnel must negotiate a number of other personal, psychological, and social issues during the transition. Just as the military develops war tactics to face its enemies, military retirees must develop strategies to contend with transition situations. The goal for those engaged in the study of transition is to assess and understand its impact on roles and relationships of the individuals going through transition (Schlossberg, 1984).

Research Questions

My own experiences led to the development of the research questions that would serve as the guiding principles for pursuing the study. In addition, the answers to these questions may provide a pathway of sorts to understand the transition from military to civilian life. The specific research questions that address this problem are:

1. How do military retirees experience the transition from military to civilian life?
2. To what extent do they believe that the transition has influenced the values, beliefs, and practices about knowledge and work?
3. What learning strategies do military retirees use in their retirement transition?

Significance of the Study

The study has significance for several reasons. As mentioned earlier, little research exists about the military-civilian transition. This is especially true in the field of adult education. It is expected that this study would provide new and valuable knowledge to the adult education field. This in turn may spur additional research in the fertile area of military-civilian transition.

The military's Transition Assistance Program (TAP) (Department of Defense, 1993) is the official vehicle to support and assist retiring military personnel in their transition to civilian society. Through a thorough investigation of the military-civilian transition process, an aim of this study is to discover and highlight ways to improve the program and in effect ease the transition process itself. This study could provide the impetus to redesign and refocus not only the military's transition but other programs with similar retirement cycles. This study would help adult educators in transition program settings better understand what military retirees will face in the civilian world once they leave the military. In turn, it is hoped that

this would help adult educators to provide more practical assistance to prepare military retirees for the transition.

Also, a focus of the study is to examine how and what military retirees learn as they go through the transition process and moreover how they apply learning to certain transitional situations. It is hoped that the uniqueness of the military-civilian transition will yield information that provides new understanding into the transition process itself. Again, this may result in new theories and themes that would add to the adult education field.

Finally, this study presents an extraordinary opportunity to provide answers to the questions previously mentioned and other problematic social issues inherent in moving through diametrical cultures. A primary aspiration is to produce information with far-reaching implications for future successful individual transitions and formal transition programs for all types and levels of organizations and adult education professionals.

Definition of Terms

The following operations definitions are provided for the purpose of clarity in this study:

Military: Any branch of the United States Armed Forces (Department of Defense, 1986).

Retirement: Voluntary resignation from work after a predetermined amount of time with a pension and various other benefits (Department of Defense, 1986).

Military retiree: A person who has served in a branch of the United States Armed Forces for at least 20 years and who has been honorably discharged (Chief of Naval Operations Instruction, 1993).

Noncommissioned officer: An enlisted member of the United States Armed Forces (Department of Defense, 1986).

Officer: One who holds a position of authority or command in the United States Armed Forces (Department of Defense, 1986).

Recruit: A new member of the United States Armed Forces (Department of Defense, 1986).

Transition: Re-entry into civilian society from military service (Schlossberg, 1984).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides the introduction to the problem of military-civilian transition. The background offers critical details of the special problems and circumstances faced by the military retiree in transitioning to civilian life.

The formulation of the problem statement and specific questions centers on the identification of transition processes and learning outcomes of the military retiree. Also, the significance of the study undertaken and arguments for researching the process of military-civilian transitions will be examined. A brief biographical sketch of the researcher and some important assumptions and limitations are cited as points of interest relevant to the study. Finally, Chapter 1 provides definitions for

the general terms used in the research and the organization for the rest of the research material.

Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature related to transitions in general and as it relates to military retirement and adult learning identified in journals, reports, etc. The literature will present substantive knowledge about transitions, including insight on the particular processes, phases, and classifications. Additionally, the literature review will demonstrate how learning as it relates to military-civilian transitions will complement the current literature.

Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology chosen for the study. This section presents the rationale for the qualitative research design and naturalistic strategy of inquiry. These methods are most likely to adequately describe the process experiences of military retirees in their transition to civilian life. Additionally, this chapter provides the methods of data collection and instrumentation.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 introduce the overarching research themes under the heading of transition. Their purpose is to present the initial rationale and integration of the findings of the research. A rich and varied description of the processes of the military-civilian transition process emerges from the study based on the responses to the research questions. From these descriptions of the military-civilian transition process, central themes became apparent to the researcher. The themes were then explored in depth to present a holistic depiction of the post-retirement process.

Specifically, Chapter 4 considers what it means to leave the military. After serving 20 or more years in the military, change to another environment naturally involves feelings and perceptions. Behavior, customs, and ways of doing things are studied from the perspective of not only leaving the military but also moving into vastly different surroundings. Moreover, this chapter looks at the elements that detail the planning and preparation process of the military-civilian transition process.

The focus of Chapter 5 is an examination of the part of the transition process in which military retirees take civilian jobs. Much of this chapter focuses on the decision-making process of military retirees after they have left the military behind. This includes how a particular career field or employer is chosen and continues on through the military retiree's integration into the new environment. Moreover, it chronicles the evolution of how military retirees begin to adjust their thinking about work through their past and present perspectives.

Chapter 6 scrutinizes the strategies employed by the military retirees to traverse the military-civilian journey. Strategies described by the respondents range from modeling behavior and networking to government-sponsored transition programs and the attainment of higher education. Ultimately, the strategies offer insight on the tools necessary to facilitate the particular transition from the ordered environment of the military to the open, opportunity-rich enclave of civilian society.

Chapter 7 documents the conclusions from the study. The summation section consists of a brief overview of the preceding chapters along with a synopsis of the conclusion section. The section further discusses integration of the findings with the

review of literature to present a clearer analysis of the research. Further, recommendations accompanying the conclusions section identify significant areas for further research and practical application of adult education programs and relevant military and civilian transition programs.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature regarding a study is meant to provide insight into the major subject areas.

> A literature review is helpful in two ways. It not only helps researchers glean the ideas of others interested in a particular research question, but it also lets them see what the results of other (similar or related) studies of the question nave been. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 59).

In considering the topic of military retirees learning in transition, the goal is to develop some understanding of the major elements of a military-civilian transition.

While an abundance of literature exists on retirement in general, the literature available on the study of military retirement and transition in particular is limited. Several studies cited here examined the various post-military retirement aspects of satisfaction, career change, and military demographics. None explored the complete military-civilian transition process. The lack of relevant source documents on military retirement points out the need for more information on the transition process that each military retiree undertakes upon his or her departure from the armed forces.

The subject of military retirement transition as learning easily breaks down into three major areas of research. They are the military, retirement, and transitions.

As the subject of the study, the military presented a separate and distinguishable culture that retained its own particular norms and values. Retirement occurs when individuals stop working after a long period of time. The physical and emotional aspects of retirement, particularly in the context of military retirees, lent itself to further examination. Transition is what occurs as individuals go from one significant event in their lives to another. Again, it was important to research this area to gain a deeper understanding of what military individuals experience during their transitions to civilian life.

Accordingly, the literature review is divided into three sections. The military section contains writings on the structure, missions, and issues facing its retirees. The retirement section focuses on general issues of work-related retirement with emphasis on early or middle-age retirement. The transition section delves into all the research on adult life changes again, especially as it relates to the retired or working individual. Taken together, these three areas provide insight into the situation of the military retiree undergoing the transition from military to civilian society.

Military

A military career can be illustrated in three phases. First, there is Officer Candidate School for officers or Boot Camp for enlisted. Recruits new to the military culture learn time-honored military traditions and customs from how to salute to handling firearms correctly. Members then attend military specialty schools before assignment to general duty (Department of Defense, 2001). Individuals

develop and advance through further military training and voluntary off-duty education. In the military, adult education is an essential and recommended part of military life. Opportunities for growth abound through in-service and civilian education in a variety of areas.

The last stage is dominated by preparation for retirement. Education remains a vital part of the serviceperson's life, but is directed toward post-military prospects. In many cases, prospective military retirees spend this stage through independent or organized adult education to prepare for second careers. This section will follow the approximate order as summarized above.

Entry

Under the authority of the Department of Defense (DOD), the United States Military Entrance Processing Command (MEPC) is responsible for processing military applicants and inductees (Department of Defense, 1986). Military Entrance Processing Command coordinates processing activities for offices of the Secretary of Defense, the military departments, and the Coast Guard. Several of these entities have specific responsibilities under their cognizance ranging from medical examinations to testing. The MEPS organization is staffed by individuals from all branches of the military and civilian federal staff. Transportation, meals, and lodging for entrants are paid by the prospective service. Major processing responsibilities for MEPS (Department of Defense, 1986) include:

1. Provide medical examinations and enlisted qualifications tests.

2. Assist the military services in ensuring enlistment standards are met in accordance with applicable service directives.
3. Process qualified applicants in the military.
4. Provide automatic data processing support of the accession processing system.
5. Publish regulations prescribing procedures for testing.

Assignments

Each service under the auspices of the DOD has the responsibility for managing the assignment of its members (Department of Defense, 1987). Military members are assigned based on a variety of factors, the most pressing being the needs of the service. After initial entry training, military service members are assigned or reassigned to a unit based on their qualifications. "The primary considerations in reassigning a service member shall be the member's current qualifications to fill a valid requirement and his or her ability to be productive in those positions for which he or she is being considered" (Department of Defense, 1987).

Assignments are also made with an eye toward maintaining organizational and individual balance. Time on Station (TOS) is the amount of time that an individual spends in an assignment. Service members routinely rotate from stations within the United States to overseas locations or to ships. The minimum TOS is three years and is closely monitored by the services.

> Time on Station requirements are established to stabilize the lives of service members and their dependents and to reduce Permanent Change of Station costs. When all other factors are equal, TOS is the primary consideration in selecting service members for reassignment. (Department of Defense, 1987, pp. 7-8)

Military Training

Not only does military training occur after processing in terms of the various orientation programs to integrate new service members into the new culture, it is a central part of military readiness. Training may coincide with a change in assignments or during a tour of duty. According to DOD Directive 1322.18 (1987),

> Members of the DOD shall receive, to the maximum extent possible, timely and effective individual, collective, unit, and staff training necessary to perform to standard during operations. Training shall resemble the conditions of actual operations to the maximum extent possible and use existing operational networks. (p. 2)

From the above description, an example of individual training to support operations would require an aircraft mechanic to attend an appropriate military or civilian course of instruction to service jets on an aircraft carrier. An example of unit or staff training would be mandatory training sessions for diversity or the military's code of conduct. In summary, military training has a dual focus to support the service's mission by ensuring individual and unit readiness.

Education Programs

In addition to military training, service members can develop individually through voluntary education programs. Under DOD Directive 1322.8 (1997, p. 3), specific categories for voluntary education programs for military personnel are:

1. Adult Education: Services or instruction below the college level for adults who lack basic skills in English, reading, writing, speaking, or mathematics.
2. Distance Education: Delivery of education through electronic media.
3. Off-Duty Time: Period when service members do not perform military duties.
4. Tuition Assistance: Military contributes partial funding for service members to attend an educational institution while off duty.
5. Voluntary Education: Continuing education programs attended by service members while off duty.

To administratively support and encourage participation in these programs, the DOD provides staff, resources, facilities, and funding as necessary. In most cases, these responsibilities are housed under an Educational Service Office. Service members are free to choose their own program regardless of their military occupation.

Transition Program

At least 90 days previous to separation from the military, prospective retirees are required to attend Transition Assistance Program (TAP) counseling. The purpose of the program is to "prepare separating service members and their families with the skills, tools, and self-confidence necessary to ensure successful reentry into the nation's civilian work force" (Department of Defense, 1993). Primarily, transition services consist of preretirement counseling, transition planning, and employment assistance. These services are coordinated with the Departments of Labor and Veteran Affairs along with federal agencies.

The TAP is available to all service members and their families up to 90 days after retirement as well. Transition programs are usually located on military installations with populations of 500 or more service members. An interesting part of the policy states that transition programs are meant to provide services through the "life cycle" of military members and begin at their entry rather than just at retirement. But there appears to be no provisions in the rest of the policy or in other DOD directives to support such a statement.

Summary

The military has well-defined programs that shape the development of the military service person from entry to post-retirement. These programs govern entry into the service, job assignments, training and educational opportunities, and

transition programs to prepare for retirement. It is clear that all programs have made an impression on the adult development and learning of the military retiree.

While the transition programs would appear to have the most immediate impact on the military retiree, it is argumentative if past job assignments, associated military training, and civilian education have more of a long-term impact on the military-civilian transition process.

Retirement

Retirement can be defined as

> a condition in which an individual is forced or allowed to be employed less than full-time (whatever that may mean in his particular job) and in which his income is derived at least in part from a retirement pension earned through prior years of service as a job holder. (Atchley, 1976, p.1).

Though the reference refers to men, it is assumed that this definition applies to women as well.

Retirement for civilians has somewhat different connotations than retirement for individuals in the military. In the civilian work force, retirement usually occurs around 60 years of age after working for an organization for 30 years or more. However, in the military, most service members retire before the age of 50 after working a minimum of 20 years. What is termed early retirement in the civilian sector is regular retirement in the military.

> Typically, the minimum age for early retirement is 55; others call for a minimum age of 60. Most early retirement plans require a minimum number of years of work (typically 10 or 15 years) before the employee is eligible for early retirement. (Ivancevich & Glueck, 1986, p. 429).

Though there remains an age gap for military and civilian retirement, the civilian work force is beginning to retire at an earlier age because of early retirement programs and changing lifestyles.

Finally, Atchley (1976, pp. 63-71) described six distinct phases that may provide insight on the military retiree's transition into the civilian workforce:

1. Preretirement Phase–may be divided into two subphases, remote and near.

   > In the remote phase, retirement is defined by the individual as a vaguely positive phase of the occupational career which is a reasonable distance into the future. The near phase of retirement begins when the individual becomes aware that he will take up the retirement role very soon.

2. Honeymoon Phase–Retirement is "followed by a rather euphoric period in which the individual wallows in his newfound freedom of time and space. It is in this phase that people try to do all of the things [they] never had time for before."
3. The Disenchantment Phase–"After the honeymoon is over and life begins to slow down, some people experience a period of letdown, disenchantment, or even depression."
4. The Reorientation Phase–"A reorientation phase is necessary for those whose honeymoons either never got off the ground or landed with a loud crash.

During the reorientation phase, the depressed person 'pulls himself together.'"

5. Stability Phase–"In the stability phase of retirement, the individual has a well-developed set of criteria for making choices, and these allow him to deal with life in a reasonably comfortable, orderly fashion."
6. Termination Phase–"Most often, the retirement role is cancelled out by the illness and disability which sometimes accompany old age."

Military Retirement

The United States Armed Forces maintains procedures to ensure military retirees receive benefits upon conclusion of their careers. According to Snyder (1994), individuals' decision to retire is not only made because they have become eligible for benefits, but is often made with respect to family situations and compensation matters with prospects for military promotion often the deciding factor. Even though individuals consider the factors cited earlier in making a decision to retire, it does not mean that they have taken the time to properly prepare for life after the military.

With military retirement costs at an estimated $36.7 billion (Congressional Research Service, 2003) coupled with a growing retiree population, retiring veterans can expect erosion of their entitlements over time as the government looks to cut costs. As a consequence, military retirees are more willing to accept less attractive or well-paying positions in response to delays in employment. (Snyder, 1994). In

addition, because military retirement is an entitlement rather than a discretionary program, its costs to the total federal budget always rise modestly each year due to a predictable slow rise in the number of retirees and survivors (Congressional Research Service, 2003).

An indirect result of these increases is that a major legislative issue concerns potential changes to the 20-year military retirement statute.

> There are rumors, however, that senior Department of Defense officials want to begin some test or pilot programs in 2003 (FY 2004) that would modify the 20-year retirement paradigm for some career members in particular service or occupational specialties, beginning in 2003. (Congressional Research Service, 2003)

The Department of Defense military retirement program is one of the 10 largest entitlement programs in the federal government, according to the Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report (Hager, 1993). The military provides retirement benefits to all regular, reserve, and disabled retirees of the armed services after a minimum of 20 years of active military service. In 1991 alone, military retirement provided benefits for almost 1.7 million retirees and surviving families (Hager, 1993).

In the early 90s there were approximately 1.7 million military retirees, with retired enlistees outnumbering retired officers by more than half. According to Snyder (1994), the average officer retiree is a 67-year-old white male who retired in 1978 as a lieutenant colonel after 24 years of service. His enlisted counterpart, also a male, served 22 years and attained the rank of sergeant, retired in 1977, and is nine

years younger at 60 years old. If the typical age of entry for officers is 22 and 18 for enlisted men this would put the typical ages for retirement at 40 (enlisted men) and 46 (officers).

The statistics cited above further complicate the issue of the relatively young age of military retirees since most veterans retire considerably earlier than the average retirement age of 62 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999). Beland (1992) found that military retirement programs for enlisted personnel tended to begin when the individuals were still in their thirties. This coincides with the years of 38-55 described by Dalton (1977) as mid-career transition. During this time, individuals commonly reassess their career abilities and talents relative to their ambitions. They are often in the process of resolving work and personal life conflicts. During this growth stage individuals deal with career competition from younger coworkers and learn to substitute wisdom in the absence of technical competency.

Perhaps the most immediate issue to the departing veteran is obtaining a second career to sustain them through the next and probably last retirement. However, in recent years this too has become one more hurdle for the transitioning retiree. Since 1994, the jobless rate for military retirees has been 7%, considerably higher than the general unemployment figure of 4.5% as monitored by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Quintanilla, 1998) In addition, retirees face a 40-60% reduction in income (Snyder, 1994). Needless to say, this combination presents a formidable economic hurdle for the transitioning veteran.

In 1997, the Department of Defense budgeted $40 million to provide transition assistance services to help service members find civilian jobs (Chief of Naval Operations, 1993). These services include computer job networks and employment workshops focusing on resume writing and interviews. But those programs do not directly address the larger problem of preparing the veteran for the physical, emotional, and social rigors of the transition process.

Brunson (1997) examined the correlation between career change and life satisfaction of military retirees who were alumni of military academies. The study focused mainly on the career patterns and occupational mobility of military officers to determine contentment levels. Participants divided into two groups, those who retired from the military with full retirement benefits and those who separated from the military without full military benefits. Analysis of variance areas including activities, financial status, health, people (associates), and general life satisfaction showed no significant differences between the two groups.

Snyder's (1994) study of the military retirement community detailed its economic and social demographics portrait. A particularly disturbing aspect of his findings was that military retirees have become more willing to accept less attractive or well-paying positions in response to delays in employment. Wolpert (1991) made the startling discovery that nonparticipation in military transition programs improved the military retiree's prospects for quicker employment, higher pay, and increased job and life satisfaction. Lloyd (1995) documented the propensity of military academy graduates to seek civilian positions similar to their military specialties.

Role theory predicts how older people negotiate age-related changes (George, 1990). It indicates the ability to navigate the necessary shifts in activities determine adjustment to retirement. Also, a role-based approach may be applied to the retirement process, because leaving the work force necessitates a shift in roles and activities (Taylor Carter & Cook, 1995).

Summary

It is apparent that the literature on military retirement is limited in its scope. Though information exists on various topics, none deals exclusively with the military-civilian retirement transition process. In this study, the literature on military retirement provided a sense of context to the literature review. Additionally, the background data on the military retirement process and associated elements provided a foundation to understand what potential barriers and opportunities military retirees face.

Transitions

"Transition is the 'passage' of adjustment from one situation to another" (Spencer & Adams, 1990). Bridges (1980) characterizes transitions as experiences consisting of an ending, followed by a period of confusion that leads to a new beginning. Schlossberg (1984) broadly defines transition as "any event or nonevent that results in a change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the settings of self, work, family, health, and/or economics" (p. 43). These changes

may be obvious or anticipated, as in marriage or the birth of a child, or less obvious and unexpected, such as failure to obtain career goals.

Most often, transitions are associated with change, but they really have different connotations, especially in terms of the context for this study.

> Change is not the same as transition. *Change* is situational; the new site, the new boss, the new team role, the new policy. *Transition* is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external, transition is internal. (Bridges, 1980, p. 93)

A "marker event" usually signals the onset of transition. A marker event is one that indicates significant change in an individual's life. These marker or trigger events (Cranton, 1994, p.77) involve a disorienting incident that leads a learner to question previous assumptions of his or her reality. Death and job changes are more dramatic examples of trigger events. In examining and taking action in response to the critical incident, individuals go through extended learning periods during the transition.

While not specifically tied to a particular generation, life events are important milestones that provide growth and direction during a lifetime. "Individual life events, such as birth, death, marriage, and divorce, are events that define one person's specific life" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Spencer and Adams (1990) describe seven stages of transition. Stage 1 is entitled "Losing Focus," or the sense of confusion or uncertainty accompanying a lifestyle change. "Minimizing the Impact," Stage 2, represents the individual's

attempt to deprecate or rationalize the sensation of transition. Spencer and Adams describe Stage 3, known as "The Pit," as the most painful part of the transition process in which individuals may likely experience sadness because of what they are losing due to retirement.

Stage 4, "Letting Go of the Past," is the point in which individuals began to move beyond their old comfort zones and for the first time begin to focus on the future. As individuals begin to consider prospective opportunities, they begin to transform theory into practice in Stage 5, "Testing the Limits." "Searching for Meaning," and "Integrating," Stages 6 and 7, respectively, chronicle individuals' attempts to make sense of the transition and adapt to the new lifestyle or change.

Several of the stages described by Spencer and Adams are remarkably similar to those experienced by the military retirees in this study. Stages 1 through 3 strongly correlate to what military retirees described as "Leaving it Behind" in which they experienced a sense of detachment and anxiety and uncertainty upon retirement from the military. The phase titled "Rethinking Work" most closely resembles Stages 4-7 in that the military retirees began to envision their futures and adjust to their new environments. While the Spencer and Adams stages and military phases share comparable traits, they differ because of the uniqueness of the military experience.

Types of transitions include anticipated, unanticipated, chronic hassles, and nonevents (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 45). Anticipated transitions are normal adult episodes typified by marriage or the birth of a child. Unanticipated transitions are

unpredictable occurrences such as being fired or promoted. Chronic hassle transitions come under the heading of events that repeatedly occur, such as in a tempestuous relationship and frequent changes in health. Nonevent transitions are those in which an expected transition failed to take place. Examples of this type of transition are marriages or career advancements that fail to take place.

It is important to note the context in which transitions happen. Consideration of the transition setting may provide the key to making a smooth passage. Particular settings may encompass family or friends. Schlossberg (1984) affirmed, "For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or nonevent that is most important but its *impact*, that is, the degree to which the transition alters his or her daily life" (p. 53). The impact of transitions is most probably what leads to learning or transformation.

While transitions are largely personal experiences, their impact may be felt in a variety of social networks and institutions. Merriam (1994) argued that individual transitions also have implications for work and family, mainly because many life events of a transitional nature occur in that sphere. The military retirees were doubly impacted by the transition. From an institutional perspective, since the transition from the military to civilian world was not part of their experience, they had to learn how to make the transition. As a subset of the transition process, they also had to learn how to change careers while also adjusting to new social and environmental settings.

The institution of marriage and its counterpart, divorce, the birth of a child, and death are commonplace transitions that occur in life. Again, in many instances, transitions are highly likely to result in profound changes or interruptions in the lives of people. Becker (1997) calls such life events a disruption of life or a period of life reorganization. From chaos brought on by certain events, individuals tend develop a new sense of order or purpose in life.

Much of the research on adult transitions centers on career transitions with more than 40 million adults, or 36% of the working population, involved (Mitchell, 1994). Gould (1978) wrote, "Men who are changing careers or changing within their career often experience depression because they are also changing the values and beliefs that helped them gain their independence from their parents" (p. 157). In fact, more than 50% of transitions primarily focused on career, with 16% that pertained to family (Aslanian & Brickell, 1980).

This is a particularly daunting time for the retiring service persons since they retire where others are typically in the middle of their career (Dalton, 1977). In the transition stage individuals commonly reassessed their career abilities and talents relative to their ambitions. Additionally they often attempted to resolve work/personal life conflicts. During the growth stage individuals dealt with career competition from younger coworkers and learned to substitute wisdom in the absence of technical competency.

It is important to note the context in which a transition occurs. The ability to place the relationship of the individual to the transition is the key to understanding

the state of dynamics regarding the transition environment. Consideration of the setting where the transition resides may provide the key to making a smooth passage. Particular settings may encompass personal, family, friends, work, health, or economics.

According to Schlossberg (1984, p. 53), "For an individual undergoing a transition, it is not the event or nonevent that is most important but its impact, that is, the degree to which the transition alters his or her daily life." The impact of transitions is most probably what leads to learning or transformation. While military retirement is an anticipated transition event, its impact is difficult to gauge because each retirement is different. "When we change, we reformulate certain internal standards and transgress our previously accepted prohibitions," wrote Gould (1978, p. 25).

Aslanian and Brickell (1980) proposed that transitions trigger learning through the following steps:

1. A change in our life circumstances may occur unexpectedly, requiring us to learn rapidly in order to adapt to the situation.
2. Slower transitions may allow us more comfortable accommodation to change by stimulating us to learn as the transition occurs.
3. After a period of life review we may choose to make changes and prepare for these through anticipatory learning.

Typically, personally significant adult transitions occur at the ages of 20, 40, and 60, according to Brundage and Mackeracher (1980). This would seem to

support the profound impact of military retirement that occurs most often around the age of 40 and the inevitable transition process brought on by the need to maintain continuity and purposefulness through the middle stages of adulthood.

Though most experts agree transition periods rarely occur in a systematic and predictable way, Sugarman (1986) identified seven phases of transition development that speak directly to the military retiree: (1) immobilization--a sense of being overwhelmed or frozen, (2) reaction--a sharp swing of mood from elation to despair depending on the nature of the transition; (3) minimization--minimizing one's feelings and the anticipated impact of the event; (4) letting go--breaking with the past; (5) testing--exploration of the new terrain; (6) searching form meaning--conscious striving to learn from the experience; and (7) integration--feeling at home with the change.

Spencer and Adams (1990) investigated the acts that accompany transitions. They informed their work largely using autobiographical narrative field research of adults in various stages of life and career transitions. Becker (1997) espouses a more recent perspective on transitions experienced by adults. Disruption theory describes how individuals develop and maintain stability in the face of the process by which people attempt to create continuity in the aftermath of unanticipated disruptions in their lives. Despite the changes that occur to and around them, people tend to use the link to their former circumstances to cope with the often unsettling and traumatic effect of transition.

It is worth noting that transitions are either normative or non-normative (Fiske & Chiriboga, 1990). Normative transitions are those expected as part of the usual or predictable life events in the adult development cycle. Marriage and retirement are common occurrences during the course of many adult lives. A non-normative event is one that is unpredictable or unexpected. A few examples would be divorce or termination from work. Fiske and Chiriboga found that individuals going through divorce were just as likely to experience negative and positive changes in their lives.

While the work of Bejian and Salomone (1995) focused on involuntary job displacement, they discussed the concept of self-renewal as the basis for career redirection to adapt to transitions. Additionally, Brown (1995) proposed a values-based approach to facilitating career transitions. Eby and Buch (1995) acknowledged coming to terms with job loss as a key strategy in coping with career transitions.

George (1990) found that role theory was useful for understanding retirement adjustment. Role theory predicts how older people negotiate age-related changes. It indicates the ability to navigate the necessary shifts in transition that determine adjustments to retirement. Taylor Carter and Cook (1995) argued that the role-based approach had application for retirement because a shift from the work force indicated a change in role by the affected individual. Hence, individual adjustment to retirement could be attributed to the ability of the individual to adapt to new roles and activities.

Since retirement signals a significant change in individual roles, it is necessary to consider the effects of midlife career transitions on adult development and learning. Following Snyder's (1994) calculations, the typical enlisted military serviceperson retires at the age of 44. This would typically place the retiring individual at the midlife stage as determined in studies by Gould (1978), Sheehy (1995), and others. In addition to the loss of career identity and financial security, workers in this category are more likely to encounter age bias in terms of pay and investment in time, more readily reserved for employees with potential for longer careers (Newman, 1995).

In a study of military transition assistance programs, Wolpert (1991) made the surprising discovery that nonparticipation in military transition programs improved the military retiree's prospects for quicker employment, higher pay, and increased job and life satisfaction. Air Force retirees who chose not to use transition program assistance began their job search sooner and were more satisfied with their personal and professional lives.

Ivie (1991) explored military experiences and attitudes as postretirement lifestyle influences across 40 years. Her research revealed male veterans with significant military combat experience were better prepared to succeed in their postmilitary experiences. Fuller's (1976) study of the effects of preretirement planning on the retirement adjustment of military personnel hypothesized retired enlisted personnel were more likely than retired officers to find second careers comparable to their military careers. He discovered commissioned officers rarely

move into high managerial positions as civilians and he felt that enlisted personnel adjusted better to postmilitary life.

Alienation and unrealistic career expectations are examples of potential hurdles the retiring veteran encounters. McClure (1993) argued that previous social and military experience put retirees at a distinct disadvantage when competing for civilian employment opportunities with those from dissimilar backgrounds. As a result, military retirees seeking a second career often settle for lower paying jobs or opt for the security and structural familiarity of government positions.

Summary

A clear understanding of the literature as related to the military-civilian transition process of military retirees is important to ensure all perspectives of the subject are examined thoroughly. In order to do this, each facet of the process was explored.

Source material on the military provided an understanding of the military experience from beginning to end. This provided a look into the military environment and its programs. For this study, the sections on military training and educational programs provided a backdrop for the career change portion of the transition process. Further, the transition literature provides information on the purpose and structure of the military transition program.

Military retirements are governed by a well-defined set of regulations that are predicated on time served and associated benefits. There were several studies that

examined postmilitary retirement outcomes. However, none could be located that examine the military-civilian transition process from a holistic perspective. This pointed to the need for this type of study to describe the subject process.

It was also clear that military and civilian retirements are not mutually exclusive. Though different from an institutional standpoint, the available literature suggested that civilian and military retirements have shared commonalities, typically in the preretirement and reorientation phases of retirement.

There appeared to be a wealth of literature that focused on transitions. Again, only one specifically investigated the military-civilian transition process and then solely from the aspect of meaning derived from life changes. Transitions not only have application to individuals, but are to be viewed through several entities. These include the environment and institutional settings, change in work, family, or personal roles or relationships, and resultant impacts or expectations. For the military retiree, the military institution naturally seemed to be the biggest variable for the transition process.

The literature cited several different studies on transitions. Many of these have a direct relationship to the experience of the military retirees in this study. While there was no single definitive transition study, many shared similar aspects and some of the phases described had direct relevance to the military-civilian transition. Career change transition literature was also examined against the backdrop of the military career change. This is worth noting, as it emerged as a

major piece of this study. It appeared that the career transition would be the most challenging part of the transition for the military retirees.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the research design and describe the methodology used to answer the research questions posed by this study. First, I present the rationale for selection of the research design and the particular methodology used. Secondly, the approach for the collection of data is presented in detail. This includes the rationale and identification of the sample that was chosen. Next, a detailed description of the data analysis is provided in order to understand how the findings were formulated. The final section includes acknowledgement of assumptions and biases associated with the research.

Because the purpose of the research is to understand and describe the military retirement transition rather than determine its cause and effects, the study demands a qualitative approach that focuses on naturalistic inquiry as the primary strategy to gather information. "Naturalistic inquiry focuses primarily on describing the characteristics of a social phenomenon. The aim is understanding the phenomenon rather than controlling it" (Mellon, 1990, p. 5). Qualitative methods are

"multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2).

This qualitative strategy lends itself more easily as a tool to provide deeper comprehension of meaning of the human condition and its associated cultural processes through analysis of the subject's perspective (Mellon, 1990; Merriam, 1998). Additionally, the use of the qualitative method of naturalistic inquiry as the primary investigative strategy is the best selection because it is not a one-dimensional search for information. As Merriam (1998) asserted, "The analysis usually results in the identification of recurring patterns (in the form of categories, factors, variables, themes) that cut through the data or in the delineation of a process" (p. 11). The naturalistic inquiry strategy provides the most rational platform for exploring the meanings and perspectives of the military-civilian transition experience.

In qualitative studies, the researcher is the prime instrument used to collect data. Consequently, the researcher's perspective and experiences as affected by the research settings become itself as important to the research as the subjects and conditions under study. This aspect of naturalistic research suggests a more complementary and richer exploration of the research problem.

Still, as a qualitative study, the research demands an approach that richly describes the process and captures it in a manner that provides deep insight into the phenomenon of military-civilian transitions. As the study proposes to observe the experiences of several individuals in the process of undergoing transition from the

military environment to the civilian world of life and work, analysis and comparison of the different experiences would seem the most logical way to proceed. Again, the qualitative method of naturalistic inquiry is the tool that most appropriately fits the boundaries of the study.

As a basic qualitative study, the research would follow a particular approach to gather and evaluate study information in order to provide an accurate description of the military-civilian transition process. A distinguishing feature of this type of research is the constant comparative analysis of the collected research information. This approach allows the researcher to continually view and evaluate similar data against each other to discover categories and themes. Constant comparative analysis consists of four stages taken in large part from Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss (1987):

1. Comparison of incidents and the generation of exploratory categories and/or properties to cover incidents and the coding of each incident into exploratory categories.
2. Comparison of units changes from incident to incident with properties of the categories in an attempt to integrate categories and properties.
3. Reduction of categories; generation of hypotheses; data are further checked to fit into the overall framework; collection and analysis ends when the categories become saturated or that no additional information can be found.
4. Actual writing of the theory from coded data and memos occurs when the researcher is convinced that his analytic framework forms a systematic

substantive theory that is a reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied.

Data Collection

Sample Selection

In order to provide a description of how military retirees learn in transition, information had to be generated through the research process. The primary method to gather data for qualitative studies is through the selection of samples. "A 'sample' in a research study refers to any group on which information is obtained" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 79) Sampling "involves the selection of a research site, time, people, and events" (Merriam, 1998, p. 60). As the study targeted the military retirees, this sector was the natural audience to draw information from.

The primary sample selection came from military personnel who had been retired for at least six months and no more than two years after retirement. They have had the opportunity to experience retirement for a while and were willing to discuss their experiences in depth for the purpose of this study. The basic and most important qualification for participation in the study was that individual must have retired with 20 years or more of honorable service from a branch of the United States Armed Forces. This parameter provided the study with a level of consistency to ensure validity and reliability. The nominal point for full retirement from the military is 20 years and so this provided a logical starting point for study

participants. In addition, the span of 12 years from the date of retirement provided a range of time that allowed for a suitable comparison of participants with similar experiences. There were no restrictions as to race, gender, economic background, or religious orientation. In fact, the researcher purposefully sought individuals from different backgrounds to participate in the study to insure diversity of responses.

The majority of those serving in the military are classified as either commissioned or noncommissioned officers. The rest function as limited duty or warrant officers. Commissioned officers are individuals who have at least a bachelor's degree and are appointed to work in roles of authority over noncommissioned officers. Noncommissioned officers by and large serve under commissioned officers in operational and support positions. A limited number possess degrees, but it was not a provision for their entry into the noncommissioned ranks. Limited duty and warrant officers are commissioned officers who come from the ranks of noncommissioned officers. They are appointed based on their work achievements through a competitive selection process.

An ideal sample would have included all of the above and given the researcher the perspective of each particular group. However, since most of the military serve side by side and the focus is on postretirement, this is not as important because all potential participants would in general have undergone the same transition from the military to civilian world. The researcher's focus was on obtaining the best and most available sample of respondents that would yield the most descriptive rich data. Therefore, no effort was made to delineate based on rank,

race, gender, or other demographics. The hope was that those selected by the researcher would provide enough information from the interviews to provide hypotheses and generalizations.

The researcher chose to use a purposive sample from which to gather information. A purposive sample is one in which the researcher selects a sample based on his or her "previous knowledge of a population" to provide the necessary data (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 87). The primary location to source individuals was located in the Midwest, home to many retired veterans and several major United States Armed Forces facilities that provide services to the group. "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p.61).

The majority of the retirees used in the research were individuals acquainted with the researcher from previous military working relationships. In spite of this previous relationship, the sample chosen is representative of the population because they possess the necessary basic qualifications and experience. The researcher also used a "snowball" sample in which several other participants were referred by other military personnel familiar with the researcher and the research topic.

Interview Participants

As noted earlier, all research participants must have served for a minimum of 20 years in the military and have been honorably discharged. This parameter was

chosen because it is the nominal point at which individuals in the military can elect to voluntarily retire from service and provided perhaps the largest amount of potential military retirees to choose from. In addition, participants must have been separated long enough to experience the military-civilian transition. At a minimum this would be six months. Similarly, at a maximum, participants should have been separated for no more than five years to facilitate recall and provide some parameters for the study. No documentation of retirement or proof of employment was requested because the signed consent form was to attest to the accuracy of the information provided by the interviewees.

The researcher used several starting places to engage qualified participants for the study. The primary sources for participants were the local military transition program, referrals from military program officials and acquaintances, and previous military coworkers. The researcher also investigated military auxiliaries such as the American Legion and other military retirement organizations. Obtaining information about potential participants through these associations was often difficult. In addition, program officials were very cautious about releasing information.

The researcher first contacted a program at a large military training facility in the Midwest for prospective candidates. This association led to the researcher actually participating in the program as a guest speaker. The goal was to share with outgoing military about the researcher's experience in making it on the outside.

From this involvement, the researcher was able to interview four potential participants. Many of the transition program participants were not deemed qualified

because they had not yet retired and so had no military-civilian transition experience. In an odd twist, rather than select from the hundreds of those the researcher spoke to as a speaker or informally, one participant came from among the program coordinators and the other three were, like the researcher, guest speakers. The program coordinator had only served four years in the military and yet, while separated from the military, had not retired. The second individual was actually located in Wisconsin and the researcher lost contact with him. The two individuals chosen to participate in the study were Army retirees who had been employed in their civilian jobs for at least a year.

The military program was also responsible for referring two individuals as possible interviewees. The individuals recommended were actually employed as civilians for naval base departments in close proximity to the program. The transition assistance program coordinator had familiarity with the individuals' backgrounds and felt they would contribute interesting information for the study. The first individual became unavailable and was unable to complete the interview process so the researcher was reluctant to pursue or print the documents without the participant's final consent. The second individual was a Navy retiree working in the same military police office he retired from.

Another source for finding research participants was through referrals from former military coworkers, both still in the military and those retired. This yielded a sizable pool from which to choose participants. Scheduling conflicts on both sides quickly whittled this list down to a total of three military retirees, including two from

the Navy. This group was notable because from it came the only commissioned officer, a retiree from the Army.

Finally, the large group of participants derived from the researcher's prior military relationships. As a military retiree, the researcher had access to individuals who he had previously worked with while serving in a variety of positions in the Navy. The length of those relationships ranged from 5 to 20 years. In all cases, the researcher was aware of the retirement status of the individuals. Out of many potential contacts, the researcher chose seven individuals to participate in the study.

All 13 of the participants chosen to participate in the study were first contacted by phone to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study. The researcher provided an overview of the study, discussed the candidates' biographies, responded to concerns, gained tentative consent, and scheduled the interviews for each interviewee. Also, prior to the interview, the researcher sent a letter to the interviewees reiterating the previous conversation and what was to take place during the interview. The letter also included a set of the interview questions to serve as preparation and provoke thought on the part of the interviewee.

Demographics

The result of the undertaking was a total of 13 individuals chosen to participate in the study. Of the 13, 12 were noncommissioned officers with one commissioned officer. There are two branches of the military represented, the Navy with 10 participants and the Army with 3 participants. All the interviewees were

between 40 and 50 years of age. The study respondents' genders are 12 men and 1 woman. The ethnic background of the participants is 1 Hispanic, 5 Caucasians, and 7 African Americans. Table 1 illustrates the participants' characteristics.

Individual Semistructured Interviews

The research employed interviews as the chief method to obtain participant perspectives and build subsequent theory with respect to the military-civilian transition process. To elicit more specific information, researchers often use the semistructured or focused format. "The interviewer introduces the topic, then guides the discussion by asking specific questions" (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990, p. 5). The interviewer will guide the discussion by asking a specific battery of main interview questions (Appendix A).

Again, the semistructured interview format would allow transition to a less structured or open-ended interview procedure as the conversation with the informant dictates. A second set of interviews of the initial informants would be held to follow up, validate, and gain a deeper comprehension of the transition phenomenon.

Table 1

Transition Demographics

	Age at Retirement	Race	Male/ Female	Military Branch	Military Rank	Length Of Service	Military Career	Civilian Career	Education
John	46	Black	Male	Navy	E-9	24	Admin	Executive Director	Bachelor's
Randy	45	Black	Male	Navy	E-7	20	Admin	Computer Management	Master's
Edward	44	Black	Male	Navy	E-6	22	Admin	Computer Consultant	High School
Frank	45	Black	Male	Navy	E-7	21	Medical	Security Officer	High School
Carl		Black	Male	Army	O-4	20	Medical	Computer Management	Bachelor's
Tracy	40	Black	Female	Navy	E-6	20	Computer	Business Management	Master's
Ron	46	White	Male	Army	E-8	20	Engineer	Recruiting	High School
Tom	45	White	Male	Navy	E-7	20	Admin	Training Consultant	Bachelor's
Arthur	40	White	Male	Navy	E-6	20	Medical	Health Insurance Representative	Community College
Jeb	43	White	Male	Navy	E-7	20	Admin	Sales Manager	High School
Robert	42	Hispanic	Male	Navy	E-6	20	Operations	Project Manager	High School
Dick	40	Black	Male	Army	E-8	20	Admin	Organizational Development Manager	Master's
Harry	42	Black	Male	Navy	E-7	22	Admin	Administration Supervisor	High School

Finally, the analysis of pertinent documents regarding the military-civilian transition would augment, reinforce, and lend objectivity to the research. A review and analysis of relevant Department of Defense and Department of Labor information regarding military retirees, if available, would also add depth and triangulation to the study. The introduction of this data would provide a baseline to compare the participant responses against normative governmental data and regulations.

Specifically, the data collection procedure noted should provide a fully developed portrayal of the military-civilian transition and should sufficiently identify processes, values, beliefs, phases, themes, governing factors, and practices of the group under study.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with the respondents to elicit understanding and information regarding the respondents' military-transition experiences. "People who live or work together or have similar racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds develop shared understandings that are communicated to others in their group and constitute their culture" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 3). Commonality among those participating could occur on a few noticeable levels.

First, the military constitutes its own culture, with many customs and mores to call its own. Second, as all the respondents underwent the military-civilian transition, invariably many of the experiences may be similar in nature. Semistructured interviews allow this knowledge to be shared with the interviewer in such a way that the questions posed do not get in the way of providing a rich

description of the individual, group, cultural, and procedural details resident in each interview.

Each interview was 90 to 180 minutes in length. The interviewer and interviewee met at a previously agreed-upon location in a comfortable, distraction-free setting. Before each interview was conducted, a consent form was reviewed and signed by the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer asked each interviewee for participation to use a tape recorder to record the interview. Permission was given by all interviewees before the interview proceeded. Field notes taken soon after each interview were used by the interviewer to record initial impressions and notable responses or items of interest. In several cases follow-up phone calls and interviews were conducted to clarify or gather further information. Government documentation was used to provide a baseline for and guide research questions. Each participant was asked, in part, the following set of questions within the interview (see Appendix A):

1. How would you describe your transition from military to civilian life?
2. What significant events did you experience in your transition from military to civilian life?
3. What factors influenced your career and lifestyle choices? How have those choices influenced your transition experience?
4. How have your beliefs and values been affected as a result of your transition?
5. What strategies did you use to make the transition from military to civilian life?

A defined series of follow-up interviews was done to fill in gaps of the researcher's knowledge and probe for pertinent themes that emerged in the first set of interviews. According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), follow-ups "are the way the researcher explores emerging themes with the conversational partner" (p. 156-157). Because the follow-up intereviews were more focused in purpose, in most cases, this accounted for shorter interviews.

Focus Group

In addition to gathering information on a topic of research from the primary set of participants, a focus group was used to insure validity of responses. "Focus group interviews are a form of evaluation in which groups of people are assembled to discuss potential changes or shared impressions" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 27). "In summary, a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Krueger, 1994, p. 6).

An advantage to this format is the possibility that heretofore vague themes will be discussed in more depth to reveal a higher level of understanding on the issue of study. A disadvantage is that individuals will not reveal information in order to avoid embarrassment or disagree with the rest of the group. Still, the opportunity for a homogenous group of individuals to dialogue on common experiences can provide focus to the research.

One focus group was conducted after several semistructured interviews. The focus group consisted of four participants and lasted for almost three hours. The same questions were posed as in the semistructured interviews. The tone of the group was collegial and collaborative since each the participants were familiar with each other from their time in the military and in their civilian careers. More time was given to discussion so that all members would have the chance to answer each of the questions. Participants had a chance to hear and reflect upon each other's responses. This seemed to give the discussion more breadth and depth, as they often provided responses that others previously had not considered. The focus group approach proved to be quite effective, as the group freely disclosed, discussed, and compared their experiences in the military-civilian transition process.

In the earlier stages of the study, the intent was to conduct several focus groups. However as the interviews continued, saturation began to occur and the researcher determined that additional focus groups would not add value to the research previously conducted through semistructured interviews.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the information collection centered around three research questions:

1. How do military retirees experience the transition from military to civilian life?
2. To what extent do they believe that the transition has influenced the values, beliefs, and practices about knowledge and work?

3. What learning strategies do military retirees use in their retirement transition?

The primary goal was to discern the resultant learning strategies and identify any phases experienced during the transition. It was just as critical to discover how the transition transformed the life and work outcomes of the military retirees. As a means to enhance the interview data, the researcher separately documented his observations regarding each interview. This practice was useful to help the interviewer begin the process of critically thinking about the interview content (Merriam, 1998, p 163). The constant comparison method was then employed to develop a set of themes regarding the information collected.

The researcher collected raw materials for the study in the form of verbatim interviews with each respondent. The tape recordings were submitted to a professional transcriber to transfer them to paper documents. The interviews were then subjected to an in-depth analysis of its contents. The data were organized into categories by coding (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) to identify ideas, concepts, and themes.

In the first stage, once all the interviews were completed, the researcher initially reviewed each transcript against the tape recordings to ensure each interview was complete and accurate. Another reading of the transcripts was undertaken to ensure there were no unintelligible areas of the transcripts because many of the terms or acronyms used were of a military nature and would be unfamiliar to the transcriber. A third reading of the transcripts was undertaken to look for key topics and ideas. The researcher annotated these areas on the side of the drafts and also highlighted the areas of interest for further cataloging. It is important to note that

though this represented the third review of the transcripts, they were reviewed several additional times to ensure all potential categories or themes were considered for the study.

The researcher also made summaries or field notes of most of the interviews. A summary included additional insight regarding the interview. For example, the summary would contain details about a participant's attitude or manner in responding to questions. The researcher also recorded particular portions of the conversation on which the interviewee seemed to place great emphasis or the response seemed to suggest a hidden meaning. Taken along with the interviewer's annotations, the summaries provided needed context from which to analyze the meaning of what was being said.

At this point four follow-up interviews were conducted to verify earlier information and ensure the research questions were answered satisfactorily. These interviews confirmed the data collected earlier and also provided new insights onto various themes. This data were integrated and analyzed with all the other interviews in the same manner as before.

The information was then reclassified and formed into more than 30 broad themes. Under these headings 30 categories were acknowledged and placed under the appropriate themes for analysis and comparison. First, the major groups and then the subgroups were compared several times against each other for consistency and to reduce information and confirm the outstanding themes resonating from the transition experiences. Each theme was analyzed separately and against each other,

not only to determine if they could stand on their own, but to also determine connectivity of the military-civilian transition process.

Themes that did not appear to add to the transition process or had little to no valuable data were eliminated or added to other themes. Then the process of comparison would begin again. After several iterations of this process, most of the themes and categories were eliminated. Finally, a few themes emerged that seemed to aptly describe and collectively tell the story of the military retiree transition process.

At this stage, analysis of the data reached a point of saturation in which no new information emerged and the remaining themes were confirmed. Saturation is the point at which no new information is learned or replication begins to take place (Morse, 1994).

The research revealed two broad themes from the interviews. First, the process of leaving the military behind emerged as a dominant theme. This suggested that emotions and feelings were integral to military retirees' perceptions about work as they made the transition from military to civilian careers. The second major theme was the strategies employed by military retirees to navigate or facilitate the transition. This included the use of career development tactics such as networking, education, and transition programs. A more unique strategy involved a form of modeling behavior based on the negative examples of individuals who preceded the respondents in retirement.

Finally, the researcher found that a reliable and transparent description of strategies, stages, lifestyle outcomes, and processes of learning in transition specific to military retirees originated from the study.

Validity and Reliability

In collecting the data, the issues of validity and reliability as defined by Fraenkel and Wallen (1993, p. 102) must be addressed to ensure its accuracy and completeness. Validity allows researchers to defend their deductions made from the data collected. Reliability of an instrument provides consistency of results. In order to prove the validity and reliability of the study, several strategies were employed.

Statement of Researcher's Experiences. At the beginning of the study, the researcher presented a thorough biography of his experiences in the preface. This was given for two reasons. First, it gives context to the study by revealing the researcher's background, military and transition experiences juxtaposed against the research topic. This includes the researcher's reasons for pursuing the research. Also, the researcher's assumptions and biases are addressed later in the section.

Member Checks. At several points during the course of the study, the researcher informally addressed data with several interview participants. One such example was the information collected on the Transition Assistance Program. This provided the opportunity for the researcher to test with the participants what he had heard regarding the viability of the program.

Peer/Colleague Examination. As the study approached the data analysis stage, the researcher worked with two members of the dissertation committee to review and discuss emerging findings. This served not only to validate data, but to ensure alignment of purpose.

Submersion/Engagement. The researcher collected data over a period of more than eight years. Through this period, the researcher became deeply immersed in the data as well as the topic of transition. This only added to the richness of the data as other data were continually reviewed and added as appropriate.

Audit Trail. Evidence exists to reliably reproduce the study results. Raw data in the form of interviews and interview notes as well as data reduction materials exist to further validate data. As stated earlier, the researcher used the constant comparative method to collect, analyze, and make decisions about information. As themes emerged they were recorded on file cards as well as computer files (Merriam, 1988). In turn, the data were regularly reviewed against other data to evaluate similarities and differences. From this approach, the researcher was able to determine and eliminate unsubstantiated categories and themes.

An adequate amount of data were collected from the various sources to ensure rigor of the study. The research continued until a pattern of repetition or saturation occured among the multiple sources of information. All collected data were organized and classified to develop an audit trail that was easily traceable to the data collected.

Assumptions and Limitations. Because of the researcher's military experience and pre-existing relationships with many of the targeted participants, it should not be difficult to gain access to prospective respondents. By virtue of shared military backgrounds, there should be a minimal period of adjustment inherent in getting to know the participants. Indeed, these existing associations may result in further participant referrals if needed. Also, participants may be less apprehensive and more forthcoming in sharing their experiences and circumstances.

It was assumed and hoped that those participants selected by the researcher would provide enough information in the interviews from which to hypothesize and generalize. This was validated when the study reached a point of saturation "such as repetition in the information obtained and confirmation of previously collected data" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 230).

The common experiences of the researcher and the subjects should also provide a richer description of the transition process. Though there remains the chance that the researcher/subject relationship may prejudice the findings, it is more likely that this shared understanding will yield even greater knowledge. This depth of comprehension would likely be unavailable to a researcher who had not experienced a military retirement transition.

Researcher bias does present an issue of contention for the study. There is the distinct possibility the transition experiences of the investigator could significantly color the outcome of the research presented. An argument to potential weakness is the multiple resources of information available from which to make an

impartial analysis of the findings. To address perceived discrepancies, outside readers with the requisite military transition experience independent of the study reviewed the study for validity and reliability.

Again, it was assumed and hoped that those selected by the researcher provided enough information in the interviews from which to hypothesize and generalize.

CHAPTER 4

LEAVING IT BEHIND

The adult life span is primarily comprised of several progressive stages (Levinson, 1986). In order for adults to continue to progress they must leave one stage behind and go forward to the next stage to continue to develop. This is also the case for military retirees. Once they retire, they are faced with the next phase of their transition.

As I interviewed the participants in this study, there seemed to be a sense of ambivalence and apprehension about moving on to the next stage of transition. Leaving the military behind was described as a challenge by the military retirees in this study. Decisions on what to do next loomed large in their future. If they hadn't done so already, they now had to decide where to live and what career to choose.

Bridges (1980) suggested that for transitions to move forward an ending point is to be established first.

> Before you can begin something new you have to end what used to be. Before you can become a different kind of person, you must let go of the new identity. Before you can learn a new way of doing things, you have to unlearn the old way. So beginnings depend on endings. The problem is people don't like endings. (p. 19)

Perhaps no other organization quite matches the United States military in scope of administration or operations. It is a vast structure that is responsible for the care, feeding, and guidance of more than a million individuals. Accordingly, military retirees have been indoctrinated through the years in different ways of living and working and relating with others. Even with hundreds of military stations in the United States and abroad, the military stands apart as a model of organizational consistency because of its rigorous administrative and operational regulations coupled with deeply entrenched customs and traditions.

Moving forward with their lives appeared to be a formidable task after spending the majority of their early adulthood in the unique culture of the United States military. So, at this juncture in the transition process, military retirees attempted to reconcile the old with the new. The first order of business for the military retiree was to leave the military behind. Their experience in the "Leaving it Behind" phase of their transition consisted of three primary components:

1. Rational Planning
2. Detaching
3. Handling Emotions

Rational Planning

For many of these retirees the first steps seemed rather simple. They often began with an inventory of skills, abilities, and desires which took place just before or after retirement. The goal for most was to gain employment before their official

retirement date. This period was often extended by two to three months because of vacation and relocation time which allowed them to leave active duty early. Edward followed this simple path. In his analysis, figuring out what he would do to support himself in his chosen lifestyle seemed to be the logical path.

> So I sat down and figured all that out, what I wanted to do. I looked at everything that I had accomplished and then what more do I want to accomplish? Do I want to start a second career and just finish that out? How long did I want to work in that second career? The first thing that I knew, though, before I sat down was that I'm going to have to do something. I'm not going to be the person that retires out of the military and not work because it financially wasn't possible.

For this military retiree, everything else took a back seat to discovering just what the individual will do in the next life. To help him leave the military behind, Edward had to first envision what the new beginning would or could become. Typically, those going through a transition undergo an appraisal process in which they evaluate their retirement opportunities (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). This coping mechanism enables them to better chart a course that fits their goals. For this military retiree, everything else took a back seat to discovering just what he will do in the next life. Ron experienced a similar set of decisions as he faced retirement.

> Before I even retired, I had an idea of what I wanted to do. I didn't know which direction exactly I wanted to go for field wise, but I made up my mind that I felt that I had the ability to work in an office environment so I prepared for that. For example, even down to the attire that you would wear; so when

> I went to Korea my last year, I thought ahead. "You know, I'm going to need suits. I'm going to need something to nicely dress into because if I go on interviews or whatever, I want to make sure I give myself the advantage." And so I had suits made over there. So, you look out for little details. That's one of the things. The other part is once I landed the job having no idea about the health care industry or anything else, I had to take a lot of manuals home and I stayed up many, many nights reading about the medical procedures, medical terminology, and things like that because I knew I had to understand what the nurses were telling me that I was recruiting so I could make a judgment call. It's a lot of time you have to spend in order to prepare. If you want to be successful, you're going to do that, regardless. I would say that's some of the bigger things I had to do to prepare myself.

These retirees prepared for retirement in a logical fashion, but retirement did not seem to follow the steps they envisioned. Many of them experienced high levels of stress as they experienced a deeper detachment process and the handling of emotions generated by the retirement. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) suggest that the impact of the transition is exacerbated by the degree in which it changes the person's everyday life. Most of the stress and anxiety experienced by military retirees emanates from three areas: separation from the military, the search for a second career, and adjustment to the new working environment. The level of stress and anxiety depends to a large degree on how smoothly the military retiree is able to move from one area to another without major diversions. As Arthur stated,

> Where you realize you're going to have to make a change and in the Navy it's a sudden and distinct change. It's not like looking around for another job where you can stay in kind of the same thing and maybe a little different and slowly evolve yourself into a different

> career field, which a lot of people do. It's when you get into a retirement you are going to have a complete and sudden turnaround.

Retirement transition itself engenders change. Though military retirees could make assumptions about the process, no other situation could completely prepare them for the unique experience of retirement. Change and the impact of change during the transition was the only thing that remained constant. Military retirement is of course a major life event. It represented the end of one stage of the study participants' lives and careers after a significant amount of time.

At this point, military retirees began to focus on rational planning to mitigate the change caused by retirement. Instead of putting on a uniform and adhering to a defined set of rules and regulations, the military retiree must now put on a new uniform and find a way to blend into a totally new cultural environment. Before they entered the brave new world they had to first deal with the sense of loss that comes with retirement. Rational planning helped military retirees to frame retirement with an eye toward leaving the military behind.

Detaching

The word "detaching" denotes shedding or coming loose from something or someone. As new retirees, the former military individuals in this study could no longer go back to their old ways of life. In order to move forward in the transition process, some things had to change. I felt this was an apt description for what the military retirees described as the second component of "Leaving it Behind." In order

to cope with this particular aspect of transition, Brammer and Abrego (1992) suggested that "the reorganization of self involves development of new assumptions and beliefs about oneself and the world." One military retiree, Jeb, thought detaching was the most principal part of the transition process.

> The most important thing you can do is to make sure on the day you leave that you don't–I hate to say it this way because it probably isn't the best way to put it, but it's the first thing that comes to my mind–the best you can do is make sure on the day you leave is that you don't care anymore. Because if you still care about it a whole lot and it's still forefront in your mind, you're going to have more problems than you ought to have and that's probably not the best way to say it because I'll always care about the Navy, but you've got to get yourself emotionally detached. You can still care all you want, but you've got to be emotionally detached as much as possible and prepared to find that new life.

Jeb's statement suggested that retiring from the military is as much an emotional as a physical activity. It further implied that it is acceptable to think about one's past activities, accomplishments, and acquaintances while in the military but not to the point that it prevents the military retiree from a going forward into a new beginning.

Bridges (1980) affirmed that

> Divorces, deaths, job changes, moves, illnesses, and many lesser events disengage us from the contexts in which we have known ourselves. They break up the old cue-system which served to reinforce our roles and to pattern our behavior. It isn't just that the disappearance of the old system forces us to devise a new one, the way that a breakdown in the economic order might lead to a barter. It is rather that as long as a system is working, it is hard for any of member of it to imagine an alternative way of life. (p. 96)

An interesting note to the issue of systems in Bridges's comments also had application for those individuals who retired from the military but remained on the same facility in a different civilian identity. This served to ease the transition for some while seeming to delay the feeling of closure for others. It would seem that military retirees who found employment in familiar military environments would more easily be able to transfer their military experience and thus have an easier transition. Robert had little difficulty leaving the military behind. In his encounter with his former military supervisor he displayed a distinct attitude of assertiveness in verbalizing how he was to be regarded as a civilian. This type of behavior may not only reinforce the military retiree's resolve to leave the military behind but also serve as an announcement to others that the transition is proceeding as planned.

> The lieutenant made a statement when I came to work the following week after I retired. He said, "it's going to be difficult calling you Mr. Jones." And basically I told him it wasn't difficult for me to call you Mr. Jones or sir for the time I had to call you whatever I had to call you. So I don't know why it would be difficult for you. So right off the bat we had that understanding. I think my next stage will be totally getting away from this environment, which was my intention initially back in 1986 when I came to recruiting duty.

It is worth noting that Robert felt it was necessary to announce his new role. By doing so, he clearly demonstrated that he had emotionally detached himself from his former identity in the military. This act broke his former connection to the military and established his new identify as a civilian. Often in transitions, "the old identity stands in the way of transition–and of transformation and renewal" (Bridges,

1980, p. 98). Robert discovered the only appropriate way to confront it was to articulate it to others so there would be no misunderstanding. This way there was no way to ignore his new status.

John found himself employed as a civilian director of a military nonprofit support organization on the same base he retired from. Though he was retired he was somewhat dissatisfied that he had not made a complete separation from the military. In an interesting twist on leaving the military behind, John tried to explain how it felt to retire from the military but still work in the same setting.

> The only reservations that I would probably have to say that I did not leave that structure, that environment, ... not that my structure is military, ... but I'm still in that same environment, because I'm still on the same base that I was at when I was in the Navy on active duty. But I accept that to the point that I am not in the Navy. I'm a civilian now. I'm a civilian on the naval base still assisting sailors as I did when I was a master chief in the Navy.

It seemed that John was not entirely satisfied with his state of affairs. Because he still worked in the military as a civilian, it did not appear that he had completely detached himself from the military, as Robert had done. His last statement, that he was still assisting sailors as he had in his former role, appeared to indicate he still felt some role confusion. He may have been disappointed that his job responsibilities did not significantly change.

It also appeared that some retirees emotionally detached long before they retired for a variety of reasons. Late in his career, Edward realized he was no longer

satisfied by what the military had to offer. It was at this point that his mindset changed and he began to mentally detach and prepare for the transition ahead.

> By the time I got out of the military, I had almost, absolutely distanced myself from the regimentation, from the structure. It wasn't because I disliked the military. I'm forever grateful for what it provided for me and that was a chance to grow up. But again, at the 15-year mark, I felt I had outgrown it. And rank had nothing to do with it. My spirit of thinking had far exceeded what the military allowed as far as day-to-day operation and I was ready to get from underneath that umbrella. When I went looking, I went looking for places that did not have uniforms, and especially did not have ships or airplanes.

Edward's sense of detachment seemed to derive from his desire to find out what else was out there in the world. Though they were at somewhat dissimilar stages of their transition, Robert and Edward both sought to change their roles. The difference was that Edward had not arrived at that point yet. Edward's detachment from the military even before his retirement caused him to consider meaning as a vital qualification for his career transition.

> Reassessing commitment to one's values and lifestyle is a central aspect of making career transitions. As one tests new options for living, these choices call into questions one's previous values as well as future commitments. This period of active reflection may lead to a change in one's values or a recommitment to old values. A new perspective on one's previous career path often emerges. (Brammer & Abrego, 1992, p. 247)

The quest to insert meaning into the transition process was similarly shared by other military retirees. Tom had also detached sometime before his retirement from the military. His meaning making derived from a love-hate relationship with

military values that clashed with his own. This certainly may have contributed to his readiness to leave and efforts to redirect his life away from the military culture.

> I think, I mean I have always been a little bit of a rebel anyway no matter whether I was 18 or 25 or 40, but there was significant changing that went through at about the 10- or 11-year point. A) Realizing I didn't really like this job anymore and B) I wasn't so keen on the company that I was keeping. They were not consistent with my own values and philosophy of life and respect and a lot of things like that.

Individual development may have played a role in Tom's feelings about the military. Levinson (1986) described several stages of adult development. The ages of 35-39 are when individuals come into their own as an adults. Tom began to think differently about life in the military during the 12th year of his career, which would have put him in the 35-39 age range. This would in part explain Robert's conflicted feelings going into the military-civilian transition.

Tom was also obviously disenchanted in the remaining years of his military career. Bridges (1980) noted that this is not unusual especially prior to a major life change. "Many significant transitions not only involve disenchantment, they begin with it. But like other aspects of the termination process, it may be only slowly that the person can begin to see the disenchantment experience as meaningful" (p. 99).

The military retirees in this study dealt with their detachment from the military on a variety of emotional and situational levels. Several found new careers in the military environment they had chosen to leave behind. Still, all found it necessary to make a commitment to move forward by emotionally detaching from

the military. The matter of detachment was further complicated by three issues identified by military retirees as particularly difficult to reconcile. Those issues were uniforms, rank, and the loss of camaraderie.

Uniform Differences

One of the main ways individuals described their sense of detachment was through the loss of the military uniform. Previous to retirement, it was something that they had not given much thought to since uniforms were prescribed for daily wear. But after they retired, the uniform was the most tangible reminder of how things used to be. The uniform had set them apart from their civilian counterparts and identified them as a special and separate entity unto themselves. Now they were no longer separate but part of the anonymous mainstream of civilian society.

The military is a very disciplined and tradition-bound organization governed by thorough long-standing rules and regulations. In contrast, the civilian work sector is made up of an amalgam of diverse for-profit and nonprofit entities that compete with each other to win or stay in business. They do not exist under a singular template because the business world frequently changes in response to public demand. For these reasons, the military may be categorized in general as a static institution resistant to change while the civilian sector is generally fluid and highly responsive to change. Because of these differences in approach, military retirees entering the civilian world may encounter experiences that are vastly different from what they were accustomed to in the military.

The differences between both entities extend even further for the military retirees. Some of the differences noted were tangible. Those mentioned included uniforms and rank. Other differences would be categorized as intangible. The clear example cited by the military retirees was camaraderie.

When individuals leave one situation behind to enter into another, there may some feelings of disorientation (Bridges, 1991). The study participants no longer would have to wear a specific uniform on a certain day or be addressed as first sergeant or master chief. However, if they were still experiencing difficulty leaving it behind, they may experience some confusion as they move into the next stage of transition.

The most obvious evidence of differentiation between military and civilian work places is job attire and superior-subordinate communications. The military requires its members to wear specific uniforms for specific occasions. While suits and more formal clothing were often required for civilian workplaces in years past, the dress code has been relaxed and casual wear is now the norm for many businesses.

It seemed that being in the military had such a profound effect on Edward that he experienced some disorientation. Uniform wear had become so embedded in his thinking and behavior that it may have impaired Edward's ability to take an unprejudiced view of civilian life prior to retirement. Therefore it was not surprising that Edward was unprepared upon beginning his new job.

> I thought that being in the military ... you know, we dressed a certain way as administrative types. In the military you didn't wear a lot of your dungaree-type stuff, blue-jean type uniform. We were pretty clean most of the time. Another one of the transitions coming into civilian life was when I retired. I just figured everything in civilian life was pretty much laid back. You didn't have to worry about being dressed or anything. When I got the job here at the company I'm with working with, federal supply, it kind of dawned on me that you do have to come in appropriate. You don't come in blue jeans and t-shirts and everything. And I think that's what I kind of, maybe, in the back of my mind looked forward to after retirement. I'm not worried about coming to work dressed up or any kind of way; just throw some pants on and a shirt and don't worry about it. I think that was one of the other "ah hahs."

Edward discovered that while the uniform is not the same there is indeed an equal if not greater expectation that individuals present themselves in a manner that is in keeping with company policy and norms. He was no longer in denial and unsure of what to expect. This seemed to liberate him and allow him to move forward in his transition. On the opposite end of the scale, Ron explained how he prepared to address future uniform issues while lessening his period of adjustment. While stationed in Korea for his last year before retirement, he began to consciously take action to position him for the transition.

> In Korea my last year, I thought ahead. You know, I'm going to need suits. I'm going to need something to nicely dress into because if I go on interviews or whatever, I want to make sure I give myself the advantage, and so I had suits made over there.

Bridges (1991) described how those at the end stage of transition compensate for their impending departure by taking action to offset a potentially unpleasant experience. Ron's search for a new wardrobe seemed to give him a sense of balance

in response to his retirement. As Edward neared retirement, he made a complete transformation as he too began to prepare to leave the military behind. Like Ron, he described his need to focus on the future transition by taking action to address it in the present.

> When I was getting off, I seen these guys when they get off work and they have their uniform on all day and have the uniform on most of the night. You stay on at the store or something you've got the same stuff on. You're off work now, change. Put something else on. Get into the real life here. Those are the ones that I knew were going to have a hard time transitioning. If you've got 18 years or so in the Navy and you dress Navy 24 hours a day, you're not going to make it.

While Ron added to his new wardrobe, Edward's preparation strategy was to stop wearing the uniform so much. In this way he felt he would be more like to "make it" because he would be more accustomed to wearing civilian clothes. Therefore he would also be better prepared to leave the military behind.

Rank Differences

The military and its members also place a great deal of importance on rank because of its strict hierarchal structure. Service members are compelled by regulation to render hand salutes and other courtesies to higher-ranking individuals. Higher-ranking individuals are also assigned to the most desirable assignments, which also increases their status. However, once they enter the civilian work force, rank has almost no influence in the civilian work force. That is because civilians

have little to no understanding about the military rank structure, automatically diminishing any importance the military retiree may have previously held.

Role theory (Taylor Carter & Cook, 1995) suggests that certain socially prescribed roles such as a professional soldier or sailor are critical elements in how individuals view themselves. The more entrenched individuals are in their present role, the less success they would have during the process if the new role did not possess similar attributes. That would reinforce the sense of loss or disorientation that may result from moving into a different culture and therefore a different role. Arthur discussed how differences in rank affect him and probably others going through a similar type of transition.

> Actually, in the military people don't even consider that because there's a pay scale and everyone knows what the pay scale is so you're looking at more authority and rank as a factor. Rank is a very significant factor. When you make the transition to the civilian world, rank is no longer a factor.

Arthur felt the stakes and machinations to achieve a comparable status in the civilian work force were greater than the military. To be selected for advancement in the military is a prestigious accomplishment. Though there are slight differences from service to service, each military branch has an advancement system that combines performance appraisal, testing, and selection boards. It is quite competitive, especially once a candidate reaches the selection board level. Meanwhile, the process to advance in the civilian work force varies to place to place and is not well defined in most cases. To the military individuals unaccustomed to

this decidedly new way of promotions, this organizational difference may be somewhat of a shock to them, as Robert discussed.

> And in the military world there's a lot of people who are rank-grabbing but there's a structure to it. I mean, they're just really doing a thing they need to do to get promoted. And those that do and get ahead and those that don't are just as happy where they're at. And pretty much everybody realized that and you were either in that crowd or that crowd and it never really mattered. That's how I always viewed it, anyway. There's a whole lot more politicking going on out here.

One could assume that politicking can be interpreted as a sort of networking. In the military, as in the civilian work place, it may help to know people in high places, but the rigidity and consistency of the military advancement process makes this the exception rather than the rule. In their study on midlife career renewal, Bejian and Salomone (1995) proposed that retirees undergo a period of evaluation of their past accomplishments which may result in some reprioritization of their new career. The challenge for the military retiree is how to reconcile this area without disrupting the transition process.

Loss of Camaraderie

One of the most cherished items military retirees seemed to have left behind are previous relationships and camaraderie forged through many years amid a variety of challenging situations and environments. On one level, those relationships consisted of individual friendships. On another level, the camaraderie derived from shared values common to the military culture.

Military members work, live, and play in close quarters on a day-to-day basis. Long-term overseas deployments contribute to the sense of camaraderie. These shared experiences are difficult if not impossible to duplicate in any other culture. According to Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995), the camaraderie can be characterized as a form of intimacy experienced by group members and suggested that "many different kinds of transitions can trigger issues of intimacy" (p. 125). It is understandable then that leaving behind relationships represents a significant loss to the military retiree. One military retiree managed to avoid this problem to a certain extent. Arthur found the best of both worlds in his civilian position located on a large naval base.

> But they miss all that camaraderie and all that stuff and, you know, I'm lucky in that. I get to work in this base in the position I'm in where I'm working with people, the master chief, the C.O. of the hospital and whatnot, who understand me.

Arthur was able to hold on to restore some of his previous relationships and the sense of camaraderie. He may have developed a sense of empathy for other military retirees because he had worked in two nonmilitary settings prior to his current position. Dick simultaneously felt happiness and sadness as he reflected on an encounter with military members in the course of his civilian job.

> I find it hard to socialize with the people I work with. It's not as much of a team that I'm used to .... We tend to have this kinship with each other. If you were at Fort Bragg, I can go to the N.C.O. club at Fort Bragg and sit down and guys will start talking to me, where are you from, I say Chicago .... You have things in common you can talk about. I can't get used to that.

As Dick longed for the old familiarity of the military, he also voiced frustration that his new civilian job did not offer the same benefits. One could assume that Dick's failure to leave past relationships prevented him from developing new relationships. He seemed lonely and caught between two worlds. In transitions, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) said, "People seem to need to be part of a social network in order not to experience social isolation; people need intimacy to avoid feeling emotional isolationism" (p. 124).

It was somewhat ironic that as a manager of organizational development and change management Dick was unable to deal with socialization difficulties in his new organization. Dick suggested that the level of shared understanding he experienced in the military did not exist in his present environment, but he did not seem certain how to address it. One assumption is that he was the only one feeling disconnected in the organization.

Just as the sense of camaraderie was developed over time in the military, the same socialization process may take place over a similar period of time in the new work place. Rather than resist inclusion and socialization into the civilian work force, Dick could focus on building relationships with his new coworkers. Unlike Dick, Arthur had begun to address how to bridge the relationship gaps in his organization.

> We have some very junior people and some very experienced people. We're a varied blend. We are actually, not bragging, the number one Tri-Care service center in this region only because my manager has put together this

> great mix and I give her the credit. She's hired just about everybody here. When they first started out we had some losers, let me tell you.

Because the manager took action to ensure the group had the same values and goals relative to that of a military organization, Arthur was more able to fit in and develop positive relationships with his peers. By removing individuals who had become distractions and reiterating the importance of service, the manager closed the relationship gap and helped to facilitate Arthur's integration into the civilian work place.

In each instance described by the military retirees, the loss of uniforms, ranks, and relationships made the transition process more difficult. "Every time individuals move from one role to another or experience a transition, they risk becoming marginal. The larger the difference between the old and the new roles and the less knowledge people have about the new role, the more marginal they may feel" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman 1995, p.128).

The military retirees found it difficult to detach from the military because they were so attached to it in so many different and meaningful ways. Living and working in the unique and relatively isolated military culture for a long period of time added to the difficulty. The importance placed on uniforms, rank, and camaraderie presented a challenge to the military retirees from a physical as well as emotional point of view. The military retirees recognized that an unwillingness to modify their behavior in order to detach from the military had the potential to delay

their transition. This type of reflection and action allowed them to move on to the next transition stage and to counteract any similar issues that might arise later.

Handling Emotions

The process of detachment and the loss of uniforms and camaraderie often led to an unexpected unleashing of emotions. In many ways, this should not have been unexpected, but it often was. This may in part be due to the young age at which military retirees in the United States retire. "The military personnel of the United States, and of most countries in the world, retire at a considerably younger age than do workers in the civilian sector" (Quester, 2005, p.2). The average age of the military retirees that participated in this study was 43. Levinson (1986) termed this as the "Restabilization" stage of adult development (ages 43-50). In this stage, individuals indicated a need to stabilize their lives after undergoing "Midlife Transition."

> Although the normal issues of career change (insecurity, fear of failure, loss of job security and colleagues, fear of the unknown) are present in those career changers over 40, they may appear in more acute form and with special intensity. The older worker may well have an established career identity, which, of course, is sacrificed to the change. Because he or she probably faces a decrease in income with a career change, financial consequences may be significant. Financial loss may affect other family members as well. Finally, the mature career changer might encounter a marked resistance on the part of colleagues, peers, and even potential employers as he or she goes about the job search. (Newman, 1995, p. 64).

Ending one career and beginning another would seem to be a daunting task for anyone undergoing such a transition.

> Beginnings are strange things, want them to happen but fear them at the same time. After the long and seemingly pointless wanderings through the neutral zone, most people are greatly relieved to arrive at whatever Promised Land they've been seeking. Yet beginnings are also scary, for they are the time to make a new commitment and actually be the new person that the new situation demands. (Bridges, 1991, p. 51)

Though he felt he had prepared well for the transition, Tom was not as equipped to handle the emotional trauma.

> I thought that I was ready to make the transition without even missing a heartbeat and it turns out that I was caught full of self-doubt and some personal conflict. Now my employers didn't realize it and I was able to fulfill the expectations that they had of me and discharged my duties and so forth, but I personally went through the first year and a half or so was an active period of what I know as depression over this. Between leaving the Navy and stepping into a new environment to the point I'll even be more open with you. I feel I can talk about it now. I actually underwent some counseling and started taking an antidepressant because that's kind of how– it's hard to explain. I also kind of shut myself out from some old friends and so I really just went into this really, really deep funk. I mean fortunately I knew more when I set into this and the family members did too and so I just finally said all right, I'll just seek a little help on this.

Tom acknowledged the transition was more difficult than he had thought it would be. From a technical standpoint Tom seemed prepared. He had done his homework on what he wanted to do in his next career. He had received preparatory training and had selected military jobs as preparation that prepared him for another career. He took advantage of his network of contacts to gain visibility. Finally, he

landed the job of his dreams. Yet this technical preparation did not help him navigate the emotional turbulence of retirement.

It is also interesting to note that Tom felt he did not meet expectations in his new career. It is not uncommon for an individual to experience a period of self-doubt during the transition. Hopson (1981) contended that self-doubt can be resolved only after the individual has "successfully recognized and dealt with any negative feelings that have occurred of loss, anger, jealousy, frustration, disappointment, etc." (p. 37). Further, Brammer and Abrego (1992) stated, "Some people experience intense sadness early in this phase and they may show signs of depression" (p. 247). The problem seemed to occur because Tom did not meet his own preconceived notions of job performance.

As a counterpoint to Tom's earlier statement, Dick seemed to indicate that he learned how to deal with his anxiety. He realized his emotional state derived from his need to exert more control in his transition experience.

> It's been really frustrating and I get kind of depressed, like what am I doing here and things like that. But I think as I go, I've kind of let go and as far as not organizing my everyday life is concerned.

Brammer and Abrego (1992) affirmed that

> A critical point is reached in dealing with self-doubts about career changes when people let themselves go in to the feeling (i.e., experience it deeply). This permission may lead to tears and expressions of anger, or it may evoke a cognitive experience of letting go of their resistance to change and their commitments to the past work. Then they will flow with the new experience. (p. 246)

Dick's decision to let go of what he was feeling allowed him to leave it behind and move on to the next phase of transition.

Fear is also an emotion that commonly accompanies transitions. Change can be a frustrating experience for anyone undergoing a transition experience, but individuals learn to adjust as they move through the process. McKee and Walters (2002) proposed that certain individuals do well with sudden changes in their lives because they have no fear of the unexpected. Fear or self-doubt can similarly prevent military retirees from leaving the military behind.

Frank developed a strategy that focused on past successes to move successfully through the transition. His mode of taking on the tasks that no one else wanted had served him well in the military and he used this as a tool to bridge the gap between the past and his future. In essence, he turned his fear of the unknown into motivation to push farther into his transition.

> When I came in I was told don't be afraid, you know, go out and do the things that nobody else wants to do, and you'll be successful in doing that. And I'm the same way now. If there's something new, something different out there, I'm going to be the first to go out and do the job.

Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identified past experience as a factor that influences transition. The assumption is that an individual who has gone through a similar type of transition in the past would draw on the experience to ensure success in the present transition. Like many of the respondents, Carl actually looked forward to the challenge of retirement. Despite his anxiety, he exhibited a

confidence and eagerness to successfully meet the challenge of making the move to civilian life.

> You're not really afraid of new and different challenges because you had enough opportunity to experience that and let you know that, I can do it. I can get it done .... I really didn't have any fears because I was sort of looking forward to that day because I had started making preparations for it. And I was looking for to it because I was like--really I'm not going to start maximizing my earnings or earning the kind of money that I think I should be or capable of earning until I retire .... Of course, I didn't have any fears, but you still have anxiety where's the job going to be or where am I going to be, you know, that kind of anxiety, but I wouldn't say it was fear or worry, just more like anticipation. I always anticipated retiring and making transition and that it was going to be successful, but I felt like, you know, I could go somewhere. The military kind of confirmed that in my mind because of all the different situations you're involved in when you're stationed different places or have different type jobs. You master them so you develop that confidence that it takes. As long as they don't want me to bungee jump or something like that, I can do it.

A complementary theory of transition is Schlossberg's 4S transition model (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p.27). The four Ss represent Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies. Those four elements represent the particular resources individuals use as they approach different stages or situations in their transition processes. Clearly, both Frank and Carl employed this method to move forward in their respective transitions. Despite his initial setback, Tom demonstrated a pragmatic perspective that helped him deal with the problems he would face in the future. In this way, he demonstrated an ability to learn from but not dwell on issues of the past. Tom felt he would now be able to use past data to guide his future progress in the transition.

> Issues and problems and outcomes and fears and risks are very similar to whether they happen at Dick or whether they happen in PSA Great Lakes or anywhere else. Shit happens everywhere. It's knowing what volume or magnitude or intensity it is because you have some experience to base it on.

Based on the response of the interviewees, it appeared that emotional turmoil was seen as more of a motivating rather than a debilitating factor in their ability to leave the military behind. Rather than back away from their emotions, military retirees paused to take the time to embrace and better understand their feelings as a consequence of the transition. Without this consideration it would be virtually impossible to successfully continue the transition process.

Summary

One of the components of the military-civilian transition process has been identified as "Leaving It Behind" by military retirees. Leaving It Behind denotes the state of moving from the military to the civilian world. In this segment of the transition, military retirees described several concerns they faced as they left the military. In order to move forward in the transition process they were faced with leaving behind some elements of their military experience. They described how they came to recognize the three components in their transition experience and moreover explained how they dealt with those same areas of concern. These concerns included physical as well as intellectual elements and came under the categories of Rational Planning, Detaching, and Handling Emotions.

From a practical standpoint, the first task for military retirees was to begin preparations for life after the military. Rational Planning concerned individual self-assessment primarily centered on preparation to enter new careers. Skills gained in the military were considered against civilian career desires. An integral part of Rational Planning was the need to have the right mindset.

Next, military retirees began Detaching from the military. Detaching involves consciously making a break from the military way of life. As one individual described it, in order to effectively leave the military behind, he had to "not care anymore" about that part of the life. To do so would slow the transition process.

Detaching involved breaking the connection from previous systems and roles that may have hindered or prevented the retiree from effectively assimilating into the civilian work force. Even as the military retirees left the familiar confines of their base or ship, they had to learn to adapt to a new work environment and build new working relationships. To complicate matters, as they became assimilated into their new work places, military retirees often encountered a decidedly less disciplined and less ordered civilian environment.

Uniform differences connoted the things that were different between the military and civilian cultures. Uniforms and rank were two areas that confused and disoriented military retirees. They now had more autonomy in terms of dress and promotion but rank and its accompanying status carried little if any weight. As they met new people, they lacked the commonality of purpose shared with their military

companions. They now had to develop new identities without the credentials associated with their familiar uniforms and titles that had previously defined them. The military is noted for its singular culture, traditions, and mission. As such, the military is a self-contained group that is noted for its camaraderie. Retirees found it just as difficult to find the same camaraderie in the civilian world.

Finally, military retirees dealt with the emotional outcomes of their retirements. Though they had experienced transitions in the military, the move to civilian life gave rise to unexpected anxiety among the retirees. This proved to be a difficult aspect for some to leave behind as well.

Handling emotional differences caused retirees to consider their fears and anxieties as a result of the transition. Rather than putting them aside, military retirees recognized the need to cope with their feelings in order to move to the next phase of transition. The fear of the unknown and one's own perceived limitations completed the transition from the military to the civilian side.

"Leaving It Behind" was perhaps the most daunting stage of the transition process for military retirees because they had to come to grips immediately with some issues in order to begin their transition. Without reconciling the concerns associated with the first step, military retirees would face difficulty moving through the transition process.

CHAPTER 5

RETHINKING WORK

Work is defined as the "continued exertion or activity directed to some purpose or end" (Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary, 1987). In this study, individuals retired from the military, but continued to work, albeit under different circumstances, in the civilian world. Each of them had logged 20 or more years in a single career for a single employer. Now suddenly they had to choose a new line of work to support themselves and their families. In addition, they had to learn the customs and policies of the new organizations. Finally, the military retirees learned how to adjust to their new environments through practical applications and experimentations.

Rethinking work is the process military retirees undergo as they begin to assume job responsibilities for a civilian employer. In this process, they end their roles as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines and become corporate and nonprofit administrators, managers, and professionals. Most transitions involve some sort of role change which is accompanied by a level of tension depending on the nature of the role change (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). This is especially true since most military roles required a degree of specialization applicable mainly to the military organizational structure.

Military retirees routinely transitioned through several new positions during the course of their careers. However, those job changes along with the work place environment were not markedly dissimilar to their previous roles. As they moved into civilian occupations they were forced to adjust their thinking to integrate into their new roles. This caused some consternation among the military retirees. What had worked in the military might not be appropriate or welcome in their latest surroundings.

In addition, rethinking work was the point in the transition in which military retirees chose new careers, tested their assumptions and expectations regarding civilian work and life, and learned how to adjust to their new environments. In this section, military retirees explain the contrast between their military and civilian work experiences. As the participants discuss their entry into the civilian work place, they describe the following five distinct areas that caused them to rethink their perspectives about work:

1. Deciding to retire
2. Envisioning the future
3. Choosing a career
4. Changing expectations
5. Adjusting to new territory.

Deciding to Retire

The decision to retire is normally the first step of the military-civilian transition. That life-changing choice set off a series of other transition choices for the military retirees. It is notable that the decision to retire led to several other significant decisions. A conscious decision is made to retire followed by the action of retirement and finally the transition to civilian life, which also consists of decisions that culminate in actions. The decision to retire occurs sometime prior to completion of the obligatory 20 years of service and soon thereafter the retiree also has to make decisions about new living arrangements and career options. It is a rather awkward time for most military retirees. Even though they have chosen in all cases to retire, it seems the decision was one they had to make. Sooner or later, they would have had to decide to begin a new career path before they were too old. Or they wanted to have a chance to make more money, as Carl desired. Or they simply grew tired of doing the same thing day after day and wanted to switch careers like Arthur. Or maybe they wanted their children to grow up close to their family or in a certain type of environment, as John did.

While there were no easy choices, there were also opportunities to choose a way of life or a career they considered a distant possibility before retirement. These retirees' decisions to retire did not fit easily into any one category. Their decisions instead were based on situations or conditions beyond their control, as in Stuart's case.

> So two years out in June or July when I didn't make chief, we just said all right, I'm just going to retire, not go up next year, so we'll just start preparing for retirement. Are we going to move towards Mom and Dad, what are we going to do? Where are the jobs, what kind of job am I going to do?

Stuart based his decision on his limited prospects for promotion to the next pay grade and discussions with his family. At the time of his retirement, the military had a mandatory 20-year service limit for certain military pay grades. Exceptions were rarely made for those who failed to attain the necessary pay grade. Once he determined his prospects for promotion were not assured, he made the decision to retire. Once that was done, he and his wife quickly began to consider the next steps to their new life. Stuart's decision to retire a few years out from mandatory retirement was one of necessity that allowed him enough time to determine a plan of action.

Edward also fit into this category, as he too had already made plans to retire at 20 years. He had enjoyed a stable, successful career and made the decision to ease his midlife career transition by consciously taking action to get ready to change worlds.

> What I did is I didn't wait until I was at my 20-year mark and say here's the big wake-up, what am I going to do? I'm not going to have a job; the retirement check is not going to do anything for me. So I kind of worked the transition in at about the 16-, 17-year mark myself.

Edward's decision to retire was more pragmatic than Stuart's. Stuart based his decision on the probability that he would not be promoted. Edward thought that

20 years was more than enough and did not want to approach retirement without realistically considering what was to come next. He realized that time was running out on his career and that caused him to make the decision to retire. In both cases time played a significant factor in their respective situations. Stuart was bound by it and Edward found opportunity in it.

The opportunity to prosper financially spurred Leon, a retired Army officer, to retire from the military. Time played no meaningful role in his decision. He easily could have remained in the military another 10 years but chose instead to leverage his military experience in the civilian sector. His goal was to test his ability to translate what he had learned in the military to career and financial success in business.

> Mine is strictly financial. I had an idea of where I wanted to be income-wise or if I made the transition from the military. Of course, you know you get a military pension which supplements whatever salary you get which helps a great deal, but in anticipation of that I did some things education-wise before I retired and then the military was really supportive of that. They basically paid for me to get my undergrad and my master's degree and supported those efforts. So I felt it was advantageous for me to take advantage of that and so I did and I felt that would help me salary-wise when I did make the transition to kind of make the money that I expected to make it pretty much came together like I anticipated.

Super (1995) found that individuals often make decisions about life and work roles based on economic values. Ultimately, Leon reached his goal to achieve a certain financial status. He based his decision to retire on two things that were also financially related. First, his education had been underwritten by the military and

would be the basis for his second career. Second, the military pension he had earned gave him the financial freedom to be selective in his career choice. Snyder (1994) noted that the issue of compensation is one of the main reasons military individuals consider retirement.

Still, research in this area further indicated that there is no guarantee that basing retirement on job opportunities in the civilian sector would significantly improve the typical military retiree's financial status. McClure (1993) found that the majority of military retirees seeking second careers often settle for lower paying jobs, while Snyder (1994) found that postmilitary retirement wages averaged 40-60% below their civilian counterparts.

The decision to retire was spurred in part by the opportunity to retire at the 20-year mark. Some military retirees considered their retirement options at the midway point of their careers. Decisions were often prompted by career change, promotion prospects, financial desires, and family considerations, especially those that concerned lifestyles or quality of life. This can be termed as the first phase of retirement planning or preparation.

Envisioning the Future

Once the career military person has made the decision to retire, they then begin to imagine what their future will be like. For those interviewed in this study, a successful career was the best possible future. As the new career blossomed so

would their lifestyle and standard of living. Jeb insisted for that to happen, first there had to be a good foundation to build upon.

> First thing you've got to have is a successful career in the Navy. Because if you spend 20 years in the Navy and you're a bonehead, you're going to get out and be unhappy. I don't think you're going to take anything good with you if you leave after a bad career. People have had bad careers. People do 20 years in the Navy and have bad careers. So I think the first thing you have to have is a good career. You have to have that good foundation behind you. Okay. The second thing I think you have to have is you have to do your homework. You have to be prepared. You have to shape all that Navy thinking and get yourself acquainted with something. No, not acquainted, you've got to sink your teeth into something else. And before you get out, you've got to have a vision of something.

Jeb did not provide definitions for what constituted a "good" or "bad" career. However, one could assume that a bad career may not provide anything of value that could be used to contribute to obtaining or growing a new career, while a good career would do the exact opposite. Those values gained in the military, whether tangible or intangible, would enable the military retiree to begin to envision life after the military. Edward was satisfied with his military career. While he also acknowledged the importance the military would play in his future, he was at first preoccupied with what that would mean for his future.

> Military retirement is something good, but it's something that augments whatever else you need to do. You're not going to retire from the military, unless you're an officer, commander, captain or above, and not do anything. You have to find other employment. And that was a rude awakening because when you first join the military at a young age, you say you're going to do your time in the military and after that you kick back and enjoy the rest of the time hunting and fishing; hobbies. You see all these commercials on TV and everything. You realize that it don't work that way when you retire from the

> military. It's something you have to get used to, I guess. When you're finishing one career, start another one, instead of finishing a career and not doing anything. That was my major concern. What was I going to do next?

While somewhat apprehensive of what lay ahead, many of the other respondents echoed Edward's feelings. Whereas some military retirees consider the prospect of making a greater income validation for success, Terry suggested a more simple measure of success.

> Probably being able to get the job that you want to do and be happy. Because too often when people leave the military, unfortunately, they don't do what they want to do at all. They're not in the field they want to be in and they're not making the money that they feel they should make because not only have they given up a position of authority and responsibility, they've given up a job that pays well. So you've got to be happy. That is the single most important thing–happiness.

Edward also followed this simple path. In his analysis, figuring out what he would do to support himself in his chosen lifestyle seemed to be the logical path.

> So I sat down and figured all that out, what I wanted to do. I looked at everything that I had accomplished and then what more do I want to accomplish? Do I want to start a second career and just finish that out? How long did I want to work in that second career? The first thing that I knew though before I sat down was that I'm going to have to do something. I'm not going to be the person that retires out of the military and not work because it financially wasn't possible.

Even though Ron did not know exactly what he wanted to do, he developed some parameters that helped him to envision the future.

> Before I even retired, I had an idea of what I wanted to do. I didn't know which direction exactly I wanted to go for field wise, but I made up my mind that I felt that I had the ability to work in an office environment so I prepared for that. For example, even down to the attire that you would wear; so when I went to Korea my last year, I thought ahead. You know, I'm going to need suits. I'm going to need something to nicely dress into because if I go on interviews or whatever, I want to make sure I give myself the advantage, and so I had suits made over there. So, you look out for little details. That's one of the things. The other part is once I landed the job having no idea about the health care industry or anything else, I had to take a lot of manuals home and I stayed up many, many nights reading about the medical procedures, medical terminology and things like that because I knew I had to understand what the nurses were telling me that I was recruiting so I could make a judgment call. It's a lot of time you have to spend in order to prepare. If you want to be successful, you're going to do that, regardless. I would say that's some of the bigger things I had to do to prepare myself.

Ron was determined to exercise some control in his retirement preparation. Rodin (1990) found this to be the most important element on individual retirement satisfaction. He Ron supervised and organized his retirement and second-career efforts to make the future a reality. The assumption is that amount and quality of planning that goes into retirement and career planning could directly translate to satisfaction in retirement transition.

It was difficult for these military retirees to imagine their futures after the military since they had no substantive vocational experience in the civilian world. It was at this point that they begin to formulate their futures based on their pasts. Work accomplishments, values, and experiences helped ease their apprehension regarding the transition. This provided the framework for them to see how they could succeed in the civilian world.

Choosing a Career

Because they had served in the military for so long, the military retirees in the study did not have much if any experience in choosing a career. Some individuals approached their new task with trepidation while others welcomed the prospect of doing something new and different. In any case, it was not an easy course of action for any of them. Still, all the participants were successful in choosing a career if working for a period of at least six months is used as the criteria. This section is concerned with describing postmilitary career choices among the military retirees.

Cascio (1995) suggested that there are two sides of a career. The objective side of a career consists of a series of positions held by a person while the subjective view of a career is impacted by core values, attitudes, and driving forces that change over time as an individual gains more experience in the working world. As a qualitative study, this research took a subjective perspective view of how the military retirees viewed their careers against impending career transition. Randy was frank about his concerns. He was leaving the familiar for the unfamiliar and to him it was cause for the utmost concern.

> I think the most significant would be the career change because that's your livelihood and it's different from what you had done prior to your retirement. At the point in the military where you are near retirement from a professional standpoint, you usually have your job down pat. You can do it in your sleep because you've been doing it for a career and you know the ins and outs and how to get things done so it's pretty much second nature.

Obviously, Randy placed a great deal of weight on his postmilitary career choice. What is especially important to note is that he described his choice of career as "the most significant" part of a transition that would also include making choices on location and style of living. Randy seemed to value his career above everything else associated with the transition. Career salience is how an individual values his or her career in relationship to the rest of their responsibilities (Swanson & D'Achiardi, 2005).

To some degree, all of the military retirees interviewed for this study expressed a high level of value about their career choices. Though there are no specific instruments used to measure career salience, an assessment can be made using the following related suppositions compiled by Swanson and D'Achiardi (2005, p. 360):

1. Perceived importance of work and career in their lives,
2. Commitment and values in different roles (work, home, community, family),
3. Actual time spent in each role relative to their values and preferences,
4. Attitudes, thoughts and degree of planning toward career and other roles,
5. Job involvement (e.g., work as a life interest, active job participation, work performance as it relates to self-esteem and self-concept).

Obviously it would seem that the theory of career salience would prove especially relevant for military retirees because of their career longevity as well as

the duty-focused culture of the military. However, it is important to note that military retirees may possess a range of career salience among each supposition. Of the five statements above, numbers four and five stood out over the others as critical success factors for the military-civilian retirement transition process. "Attitudes, thoughts, and degree of planning toward career" and "job involvement" were the issues most cited by the military retirees as primary factors in career choices. It was important to note that no military retiree fell under the supposition of "actual time spent in each role relative to their values and preferences." To determine the influence of career salience on the military retirement transition it was necessary to examine the precepts against the military retirees' experiences. This provided a deeper understanding of the thought process of the military retirees in the career transition process.

Perceived Importance of Work and Career in Their Lives

Since military retirees had worked to develop expertise in a single field over 20 or more years, combined with the core values of duty, honor, and country esteemed by the military, it would not seem unusual that the retirees deemed work and career an important part of their lives. As Arthur considered retirement, he was very clear about the integral role he desired work to play in his life. The choice of a new career that was not as demanding, thereby providing a more comfortable lifestyle in which to spend more time with his family, was the focal point of his career transition.

> The most important thing is you need to think about how you want to live the rest of your life, what kind of lifestyle do you want, and that's kind of what I did. And that was my primary focus as indicated by me turning down one job and taking another, even though it was higher paying. It was to me less stress knowing I was going to locate in this one area and I could find just about anything in this area to get started at. Set your priorities. Know what's important to you. If making it is important to you, then go for the gusto and get the best kind of job you can get.

For Arthur, a balanced life was as important as the choice to work in a familiar and comfortable environment (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Arthur may have viewed the transition as an opportunity to restore balance in his life by choosing a career that would be less stressful and enable him to devote sufficient time and energy to his family. He also sought to maintain a level of comfort and familiarity in his lifestyle. Comfort is described by Dawis and Lofquist (1984) as a work value that is typified by a stress-free and relaxed work environment. The assumption is the transition would be smoother since there was less disruption to Arthur and his family's standard of living.

Commitment and Values in Different Roles (Work, Home, Community, Family)

Adults have multiple roles in life. All the roles associated with family (father, mother), work (employee, business owner), or community (little league coach, alderman) require a certain level of commitment in order to be successful. Role theory (Taylor Carter & Cook, 1995) suggests that individuals have the ability to navigate the necessary shifts in activities and may be applied to the retirement process because leaving the work force necessitates a shift in roles and activities.

Sometimes the most obvious path after retirement is not the best path for everyone. In the case of Tom and others, a new role is needed in order to feel a sense of commitment and value.

> I think I was contributing some value. But again, as well as I was doing on my performance reports, I knew that again this was outside of the track and I wasn't going to get any recognition and so, but it was a deliberate choice I made. And I also was going to school then. I was going to the SIU program and I finished up my degree work and had the basic training degree and the thing was, I was in it for me almost by that point. I had given 40 hours or more for 40 hours' pay. I was also looking out more for myself and how I was going to transition. So I guess that gives you kind of a recap of what I did with my first career.

Even though Tom perceived that he was valued for his work in the military, it was apparent that he was not as committed to the military as he could be. So as part of his preparation for a postmilitary career in consulting, he had chosen jobs and an academic curriculum that would ultimately provide him with the recognition he valued. In their study on role theory, Taylor Carter and Cook (1995) found that preretirement work or social relationships, behaviors, and activities influenced the retirement transition experience. Tom's somewhat indifferent experience with his peers and superiors in the military had seemingly caused him to feel that a new role change would make him feel committed and more valued.

Attitudes, Thoughts, and Degree of Planning toward Careers and Other Roles

Robert carefully and systematically considered his career options before retiring from the military and finally settled on a career with a federal contractor.

> I went from the top of the list and worked my way down and if this don't work, I've got one other option and that's the federal government and that's what I'm doing right now. It's not that this didn't work--it's just that I think it's taught me to move on, move further up instead of staying level on the plain where I am right now. The only way that I can move up in this position now is with a different contract anyway. The contract that I'm on right now for federal supply is not going to go any higher and I realize that now.

Though Robert took a decidedly rational approach in choosing his civilian career, he was content with the outcome. He also noted that the process he chose was not as successful as he would have liked. Even while Robert was careful to consider all his options, he made no real effort to further prioritize his choices for a career.

Ron felt that retirement was an opportunity to take control of his life and career. He purported that a positive, goal-oriented attitude combined with hard work and preparation would allow military retirees make a successful civilian career transition.

> Do whatever it takes to reach your goals because it's reachable. All they have to do is work at it. It doesn't come all at once. That's one thing they need to understand. Obviously, there's some luck involved, too, being at the right place at the right time, and networking with the right people, whatever the case might be. A lot of times I believe you create your own life, too, so the more you do, the more you create.

Ron indicated the need to set goals that are achievable. Goal setting helps those in transition to imagine a better future through conceptualization, choosing realistic possibilities, and formulating feasible goals (Egan, 1994). On a basic level, Ron's attitude about career transition has basic similarities to the military

organization. In peace time, the military is in a constant state of training with the central goal of preparedness for war. It is not surprising that Ron would take a similar attitude of preparedness about his career choice after the military.

After her initial civilian career success, Tracy began to articulate her options for future career opportunities. In the process, she made plans to align her educational pursuits with her career goals.

> I feel as though that although I do have a master's degree in criminology or criminal justice rather, I'm not really utilizing it but it has caused some doors to be opened because I do have a degree and I see now that once I am in a position I'm considering on getting another degree perhaps in management, so that I could be more marketable. So that's what I'm looking forward to. That's one of my goals once I get in, learn my job, get my family situated and then go back to school and get a degree in management.

As they set goals and planned thoughtfully, Ron and Tracy showed a desire to gain control over their careers. "Career control means that individuals feel and believe that they are responsible for constructing their careers" (Savickas, 2005, p. 54). Tom reiterated the importance of career control as it pertains to future success, not only in the transition but throughout the lifespan.

> I am in an opportune moment in time to go in any direction I want to go in and to go far down this road that I want to go to and then take a left turn and so I feel it's more like at the beginning than at the end. Because that's the way I think it should be, to me .... I don't think the journey ever ends because if you allow yourself to see the end what's the point? What happens next?

Like the others, Tom recognized that ultimately he was responsible for his future. He discovered that he was on a journey that would play over his lifespan. "The belief that they own their own future and should construct it by choosing rather than chancing leads individuals to sense that they are responsible for their lives" (Savickas, 2005, p. 54).

Career choice was a concern the military retirees dealt with regarding how to plan their careers. Moreover, study participants discussed how their values and needs affected their choices. The ability to plan their career transition helped retirees to exercise the control necessary to meet their career goals.

Job Involvement (e.g., work as a life interest, active job participation, work performance as it relates to self-esteem, and self-concept)

The category of job involvement can be explained as the way individuals valued themselves through their career choice. In other words, they placed a high value on work as a way to validate their existence. Tom was more than ready to leave the military upon retirement. He identified a career in management consulting as a goal several years before leaving the military. He sought and was assigned to several military assignments that allowed him to hone his consultative skills. Work on projects that required consultative skills prepared Tom to enter the consulting field. Internships and referrals combined with his military background culminated in employment at one of the major management consulting firms. All this had given

him a high degree of confidence in his ability to become successful in his new career.

> I know what I'm capable of and what I can do and what I want to do and I'm moving myself as fast as I can towards that goal. But I don't know if that's with this firm in another couple of years or with somebody else.

Upon further examination Tom's words betray a certain lack of confidence. He felt he could do the job but he was not sure if his performance was enough to guarantee continued employment with the company. So despite Tom's confidence in his abilities, his self-esteem appeared decreased as he evaluated his longevity with the organization. "In career construction theory, confidence denotes feelings of self-efficacy concerning the individual's ability to successfully execute a course of action needed to make and implement suitable educational and vocational choices" (Savickas, 2005, p. 56).

Unlike Tom, Dick, prior to accepting his new position, was not confident about his career transition prospects. He did not seem to feel his military career experience was good enough to translate to success in the civilian work force.

> Although I think I have a high level of self-esteem, I don't have a high level of confidence in myself so I wasn't really confident that anybody would pay me to do what I did. If I was worth on the job market what I wanted my salary to be and I been kind of coasting along at that point. The moment of truth was had I been coasting for 20 years.

Dick's statement seemed to be contradictory, but on closer examination has merit. His initial statement about having a high self-esteem is rooted in the past and

the present. Dick didn't have the same assurance for the future. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) proposed that "not all lack of confidence is internally based and therefore 'curable' through attitudinal change. A person may be reacting realistically to a situation that is indeed discouraging and perhaps beyond his or her ability to fix" (p. 181). Dick was unsure if his current skills were good enough to successfully transfer to a new career.

Randy's confidence, on the other hand, was bolstered in large part because of what he had learned in the military. He felt it was important to consider the total body of knowledge that makes up a military career. This would include not only professional military job training and experience but general military training as well.

> Also, be confident of some of the things that you learned both consciously and unconsciously in the military because in the military there are a lot of areas that the civilian sector can emulate as far as race relations, the humanistic aspects, women are respected, there's no gender bias that's tolerated. There's no racial bias that's tolerated. You're able to compete in the military, and you can go as high or as far as your abilities will allow you. I don't know if that's always the case in the civilian sector. I think those are some things that the civilian sector can kind of mimic from the military, and it would be a positive for the civilian sector.

Randy observed that the military provided other valuable skills that would not be considered military-centric. He suggested that these skills are a product of the military than can be useful in the civilian world. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) stated that "transferable skills are usually described as being those skills that one can carry from one job to another, such as organizational or communication

abilities, or the ability to read a technical manual" (p. 144). Randy's job involvement was high because he was able to readily transfer skills to his new career, thus elevating his self-esteem and work performance.

This would suggest that prospective military retirees should approach their military-civilian transition with a certain degree of confidence because of their total military employment package that would highlight relationship skills, experience working in foreign countries, and arduous assignments, as well as specific job and general military training and experience. This would make up the total military employment package. A similar analogy would be how many civilians now use a total compensation package to denote employee benefits. This would include not only an employee's salary but any annual incentive or bonus pay and the relative cost of their health insurance and retirement.

Perhaps the most vivid description of confidence comes from Tracy. After a somewhat disappointing military career, she regained her confidence and found her footing as a manager at a Fortune 500 company. She summed up what she had learned from herself as well how the transition had affected her confidence and future career prospects.

> What have I learned about myself? Again, going back to not doubting myself, my capabilities, knowing that I can swim with the sharks as they say, well, I'm learning to swim with the sharks. I would say that I'm learning, that I've learned that I can swim with the sharks, that I no longer have to be intimidated by swimming with the minnows and I like that feeling.

Career salience was perhaps the biggest influence for military retirees as they chose careers. Because of their military orientation, it did not seem unusual that they demonstrated an affinity toward careers that were personally important to them and were based on commitment and a set of values. Military retirees were especially motivated in their attitudes toward career planning and job involvement. This may indicate that the military retirees chose careers in which they could have a significant input in future outcomes regarding roles and quality of life.

Changing Expectations

In most cases, when the military retirees transitioned into their new careers, they were not sure what to expect. Two factors had a significant impact on expectations of the military retirees who participated in this study. One was the fact the study participants previously worked in a culture that was noted for its singular emphasis on a high degree of rules, discipline, and tradition. The other was that the military retirees were entering an ever-changing culture that encouraged thinking out of the box and spontaneity. Work roles usually have established guidelines and expectations for appropriate behavior (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). With no familiarity for the new culture they had entered, military retirees often experienced disconnects as they encountered certain situations.

The major purpose of the military's rules and regulations are to promote order and discipline among its service members. Because of their backgrounds it would seem that departing military retirees would have little difficulty adhering to

any civilian policies and norms. Additionally, many of the military retirees had worked in less than ideal situations on crowded ships and in foreign countries. They had been trained and served under arduous conditions that were outside of the norm for most civilians. These factors colored the expectations and assumptions of the military retiree.

It should be noted first that virtually no civilian organizations exist without some sort of rules to guide its operations. And so, some of the retirees were surprised when they discovered their preconceived expectations and assumptions did not always line up with the reality they faced in the civilian work force. These new rules caused them to reexamine their previous perceptions and subsequently make adjustments to transition successfully from military to civilian work.

When things did not happen as they expected in the civilian work place, the military retirees experienced dissonance in their transition. Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman (1995) characterized the dissonance experienced by the military retirees as the "moving in" part of transition. Those undergoing transition in this stage "need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system" (p. 45). This helps individuals to orientate themselves and learn what is expected in the new organization.

Military retirees assumed civilian employers would have a better understanding and appreciation for their prior career accomplishments. Instead, Ron found that his previous service was no guarantee for success. So, he was treated no differently from his civilian counterparts.

> You can't go out there with the attitude that they owe you something because they don't. I think a lot of military people think that. Well, okay, I served my country, and I did my time so somebody owes me something. They can't have that attitude. They've got to go out there with an attitude of, I want to make good, and I've got to do everything within my power--I know I have a lot of tools under my belt so I'm going to go out there and do what I need to do, but don't expect it. You have to go out there and earn that.

Ron realized his service and experience would not grant him automatic access to a civilian career. Bridges (1991) described this in-between place of transition as the "neutral zone." Military retirees in this phase experienced difficulty as they attempted to reconcile the military experience with their new civilian careers. Ron's solution to his dilemma was to translate his past accomplishments and experiences into what was needed for his present career.

It was mentioned earlier that a common assumption of military retirees is that civilian work is less demanding than the military. Edward's false sense of military superiority gave way to the reality that some norms regarding work are fundamental and universally applicable to different cultures.

> In my transition, one of the things I figured it's laid back, it's relaxed out there, it's not like it is in the military where you have to be here on time and I guess that was one of the things that lit off a bulb because they want the same thing in civilian life.

Edward found that things are sometimes not what they appear to be. Transition often occurs on several different levels. Not only was Edward in the midst of "moving in" to a new job, but he also had to learn a new culture and the

expectations that accompanied each of those elements as depicted by Bridges's (1991) neutral zone theory.

Another assumption or expectation of military retirees was that they would be recognized more often for their performance. In the military there is no end-of-the year or annual bonus or pay system. Individuals receive a base pay and certain incentives called allowances for hazardous, special duty, etc. Meritorious achievements are mainly recognized through the awarding of medals or letters of commendation. With incentive pay not a factor in the military, the standard approach to recognize performance is verbal from reporting seniors.

Since medals or letters are not awarded lightly, and performance appraisals are only an annual event, this serves as the main vehicle for recognizing individual performance in the military. Edward also apparently expected the same type of recognition from his civilian managers. It was obvious that he was somewhat disappointed at the response he received.

> When I was in the Navy, I wanted to do the best that I could on anything that I did. It felt good to me when someone told me, "You did a good job. I like how you work." And going back into civilian life, when you do that, depending on where you are, sometimes you didn't get that "good job, I like how you work." It's kind of overlooked. I think that was one of the things that I finally realized and it kind of came back to me as far as transition from military to civilian life is that you probably won't get as many accolades in civilian life depending on the corporation you work for as you would in [the] military. When you do something good in the military, nine times out of ten it's going to be rewarded. Someone's going to see it. In civilian life, it just wasn't that way at first, you know, when I first got out. The company I'm with right now is pretty good. When you do something good, if it's seen by one or two people and it gets back to the management, they'll call you every once in awhile or shoot you an e-mail and say, good job, or something like

> that, but not like it was in the military. That's the major thing that I see .... I kind of like to hear it every once in awhile, "good job." The compensation is good. You never want to pass that up, I wouldn't, but it just ... to me it feels better when someone comes up and shakes your hand and says, you did a good job.

It is clear that there was a gap between Edward's expectations and the reality of the work place.

> Adjustment to the consequences of occupational or specific job choices depends on factors in the work environment and on characteristics of the individual. The most powerful of these factors is the magnitude of the discrepancy between what the individual expects to find in terms of work requirements and rewards and what the environment provides. (Minor, 1992, p. 16)

Edward learned to adjust his expectations regarding recognition in his civilian job. It is important to note that while Edward did not receive the same level of recognition he came to expect in the military, there may be other factors to consider. Other civilian organizations may encourage verbal recognition for individual performance. The other factor to take into consideration is that Edward's performance may not have met the norms for such recognition. It is clear that there was a gap between Edward's expectations and the reality of the work place. Recognition is really an outcome of performance and appeared to have even more impact on the military retirees' transition. Tracy found that performance expectations between military and civilian organizations may also be different from a financial perspective.

> But in the civilian world you are held accountable for your actions and want that paycheck so you are going to perform and be a leader .... And plus on top of that, going back to the money, it's motivated by how well you produce, your results, and stuff like that. So sometimes your pay is based on that .... It puts you in the forefront to perform because basically I would feel as though that in the military, although you do have a contract, unless you do something real wrong in the military, that's the only way they're going to let you go.

Contrary to the military, civilian businesses introduce an added layer of accountability by attaching pay to performance. Environmental work factors may have a significant effect on the retirement transition process. Harper and Shoffner (2004) cited pay, benefits, and rewards as reinforcers or factors that describe the ability required to perform certain work roles. Rather than shrink from the challenge, Tracy seemed energized by the prospect of influencing her future compensation through high performance. Edward realized an important distinction between the military and civilian performance measures.

> They don't fire you in the military. They give you a little disciplinary action and it's over with. But in civilian life, it's a little different. If you're constantly coming in late, being tardy for different things, it will cost you your job. A couple of pink slips will wake you up. I think that was one of the things that happened. It didn't happen to me, but someone that I worked with at one time had that problem and he got fired just like that. And you think about it. You say, "whoa." Hopefully, that won't happen to me.

Russell (2005) suggested that "outcome expectations affect the level of performance goals and subgoals that people set for themselves" (p. 209). Edward's concern for job security caused him to adjust his performance so that he would not

be labeled as a poor performer. Arthur contrasted the different performance outcomes for military and civilian workers.

> If you were assigned a below-average performer in the military, you still are challenged to try and develop that individual and get whatever production you can out of them, where in the civilian sector, if someone was not cutting it, you could probably just terminate them and get somebody else, or if you didn't particularly like a work-related situation in the civilian sector, you have the flexibility to float your resume and find another position. In the military, you don't have that option. You can't just say, "I don't like this unit, I'm just going to leave and find another unit." You have to pretty much work within that system. That's the difference.

Military retirees unable to meet civilian performance expectations ran the risk of being terminated, which was something they had never experienced. However, they did not have to stay in the role if they experienced difficulty meeting expectations or the job did not meet their own expectations. In any case, the level of job security they knew in the military had become a thing of the past. Randy also discovered good performance and rewards don't guarantee job security.

> My beliefs have changed somewhat because I think by me having a military career I was kind of naïve to certain aspects of the work environment outside the military because in the military there is more job security, and if you do a good job, you know you're going to have a job. That's not the case in the civilian sector because in my first job after retirement, I did a good job and got rewarded with significant raises and everything was going great. All of a sudden you get a call that we've decided to reorganize and we've cut your position.

The military provides service members with free medical benefits, affordable housing, and, above all, job security. The nature of its mission, the ongoing

instability in the various parts of the world, and the United States acknowledged role as a world leader, virtually ensure military employment for a long time to come. Over time, the military has proven to be immune to downturns in the economy and subsequent corporate downsizings and mergers. Security is something the retirees had become accustomed to while serving in the military. Individuals entered and stayed in the military because of the relative security and guaranteed pension. Tracy was actually downsized from her first civilian job.

> Then the company cut some of their management positions and by me being relatively new to the company, my position was one that was cut.

Downsizing is the planned elimination of jobs within an organization (Cascio, 1995). The shock of being let get for reasons other than performance was traumatic for the military retirees. No longer could they expect to maintain a job just because they were good performers. Though they seemed aware of how things worked in civilian businesses, the military retirees were ill-prepared for the realities of corporate life. It caused Randy to do some major reflection on his situation.

> And that was like a wake-up call to me that job security is not the same in the civilian sector and it's not predicated on whether you're doing a good job or not. It's predicated on, "Maybe we're going to do something different so we're going to cut some of our management positions." So that was a wake-up call and that kind of changed my beliefs in the sense that now I'm much more aware that those kinds of things happen. It's not personal. It's just a business decision.

The reality of unexpected mergers, layoffs, and restructuring was a new experience for the military retirees. When they satisfactorily followed orders in their military careers, they were guaranteed a measure of security and stability. The civilian sector did not have the same certainty for career longevity. Now they had even less control of their situation in a significantly different culture.

In discussing the effect of control on transitions, Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) wrote, "The source of some transitions is internal, a deliberate decision on the part of the individual, whereas the source of others is completely external, and the transition is forced upon the individual by other people or by circumstances" (p. 55). Clearly the latter was the case for the military retirees. However, as John discovered, military retirees don't have to cede total control of their situation.

> Maybe sometimes in the military we take things for granted, that you have a job forever. But, when you leave the military, you have to look at it's not as easy as you think. Not saying that things are handed to you on a platter in the military, because you definitely work for everything you get, but sometimes when you get into the civilian sector, it's a little bit different; much different, especially today with all the downsizing, all the transitioning, merging, etc. You have to be one foot ahead of everything that you change. I think, if you can, you need to continue to better yourself too.

Though John was concerned with the lack of control he had over his situation, he proposed a solution to his and others' transition situations. To address uncontrollable factors as reorganizations, downsizing, and mergers, he recommended

that military retirees prepare beforehand in order to adapt to the uncertain civilian work environment.

This section captured the contrast in expectations experienced by the military retirees. Study participants retired from the military with certain assumptions and expectations for the transition. They discovered that their expectations on the nature of work, including performance and rewards, were markedly different than their prior military experiences. They discussed the issue of control and provided solutions that enabled them to adapt to their new careers and environments.

Adjusting to New Territory

The ability to adapt to career change would seem to be a necessary characteristic of military retirees. Without this ability they could experience some difficulty moving through the transition in a positive manner. "Career adaptability is a psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's readiness and resources for coping with current and imminent vocational development tasks, occupational transitions, and personal traumas" (Savickas, 2005, p. 51).

After choosing a career and reconciling expectations, military retirees began the process of adjusting to their civilian surroundings. The term, "adjusting to new territory," was taken from one of the study participants as he attempted to describe career change. Adjustment represents change from the retirees' standpoint of taking off the uniform and thus remaking themselves. New roles and environments impact career change as well. In terms of the transition, new territories symbolize that the

retirees are crossing the military border into civilian country and that it entails relating to work and culture. For Jeb, it was important to first acknowledge the enormity of the transition itself.

> But, the challenge with the career change is that this is new territory. This is a new environment and you have to make that adjustment to how things are done with this new company. I think that was the most significant event.

Jeb bypassed his own expectations and focused more on gaining an understanding of his new environment.

> The transition to a new job requires the worker to understand the expectations of peers, subordinates, and supervisors, and also to learn the company's formal and informal norms. It often requires learning new skills and almost always requires learning new ways of using old skills. (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, pp. 156-157)

Accordingly, Ron's military experiences were instrumental in allowing him to succeed in his new career.

> All of a sudden I went from working with a combat engineer company and dealing with some businesses, and all of a sudden going in as a recruiter for a hospital recruiting nurses and other medical staff. It was something I had to learn very quickly, learn about medical terminology, how a hospital actually operates, and all the little things involved in running a hospital. I think once you have an idea, you can catch on rather quickly and have a good idea of what you can do. I think a lot of other people have done that as well.

As he learned more about his new job, Ron became more comfortable in the civilian environment. The ability to quickly learn to adapt to new environments may be a shared skill of military retirees gained through the common military experience

of multiple job moves. Individuals moving to a new job in the military were expected to quickly learn the lay of the land regarding procedures and people. It is not difficult to see how one would call upon familiar experiences to succeed in a vastly different setting if the basic context remains the same. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) concurred that past experiences, especially if they were favorable, may have similar influences on future transition outcomes.

Tracy, a computer technology professional while in the military, obtained a management position with a Fortune 500 telecommunications firm. Though she had 20 years of experience, she had virtually no related leadership experience.

> At first I was like wow. At first I was like reluctant. No, that's not me, I'm thinking more corporate 9:00 to 5:00, right. But, then I say if they're willing to give me a chance, I'm going to go for it. And again I had the responsibility of about 35 to 40 people so, and then like I said, basically they prepared their managers to be effective leaders and at first I was kind of scared, but then after being in there and you have the support of other supervisors to talk to you because they've done the job before. It was okay.

Tracy found success in a leadership role only after leaving the military. She was unsatisfied with her military career because her capabilities were not effectively utilized in the military. While in the military she earned bachelor's and master's degrees and mastered several computer applications. However, this did not translate into career success for her. Tracy's retirement from the military represented an opportunity to take control over her career and fulfill her goals. Her ability to adjust to her new civilian career ensured her success.

The adjustment to new territory was somewhat different for a few others. Robert and John retired from the military but found themselves working in nearly the same capacity at the same military facility from which they had retired. Their adjustment would seem to be less challenging than the other military retirees. Robert assumed a position as a project manager for a civilian contractor and exercised supervisory control over the same military civilians he had worked with as a military security officer. Though many of the duties remained the same, he no longer reported to the civilian chief of police or participated in the customary military inspections or programs.

> As a civilian, obviously, you have to be more careful with what you say, what you do, because of repercussions of suits. Lawsuits, grievances, not just towards you but towards the company. So even while in the military you had to have that certain standard as manager of what you could do and what you could say. But you could only just get reprimanded or in trouble in the military maybe. In the civilian world, I can get reprimanded, in trouble, and it could be civil repercussions. So I'm not trying to get sued.

The new territory for Robert was the introduction of civilian policy and laws governing the management of employees. He did not feel that the environment had much effect on his adjustment. Instead, Robert implied that his managerial skills were transferable to his new role. Brammer and Abrego (1992) characterized the transferral of functional skills as a coping skill used during the transition. It may be useful for all military retirees to perform an inventory of their skills before going through the military-civilian transition process. Similar to Robert, John assumed a leadership position with a not-for-profit military financial support agency that took

advantage of his previous role as the chief enlisted advisor to the commanding officer of a large command. His job in the military often entailed counseling individuals in financial difficulty.

> I'm a civilian on the naval base still assisting sailors as I did when I was a master chief in the Navy. And you know, that was another transition to make because I had already mentally accepted the fact that I left the military. I had to readjust my way of thinking that I was back in that same environment.

Because the environment was the same, John may have felt it was easier to revert back to his military status. So he focused on his status as a new civilian employee. His recognition and acknowledgement of his change in status seemed to help him make the adjustment to his new career.

In the military, Carl worked as a medical professional but had transitioned to a new role as a security professional in a large telecommunications company. He described how his adjustment involved not only a change in career and the problems that posed, but how he had come to reflect on how the adjustment had changed him.

> I've become more disciplined in that I'm able to focus now and become single-minded in pursuit of certain goals .... While I have learned to be able to focus my efforts now and to work smarter instead of harder, I've become more open minded. I'm more receptive of other people's inputs and ideas and not that I agree with them, but at least now I'm willing to listen and extract from that the things that are good and things that don't fit into my scheme.

Carl attempted to translate the meaning of his transition experience. In addition, he incorporated it into his world view. This type of reflective thinking

would appear to be important not only to progress in the transition but as a tool to spur individual growth and development as well.

> Reassessing commitment to one's values and life style is a central aspect of making career transitions. As one tests new options for living, these choices call into question one's previous values as well as future commitments. This period of active reflection may lead to a change in one's values or a recommitment to old values. A new perspective on one's previous career path often emerges. (Brammer & Abrego, 1992, p. 205)

This statement perhaps best captures the experience of the military retirees' transition experiences. They were faced with what appeared to be a new and constantly changing landscape. In the course of their transition journey, they looked both inward and outward to learn from their experiences, which allowed them to gradually adjust to their new circumstances.

Adjusting to new territory was an essential component of the transition process for military retirees. It entailed learning the rules of engagement of the new organizations as they moved into new roles. Self-efficacy or the ability to project future career success was a trait that was helpful to the military retirees. An ability to successfully transfer skills gained in the military to the new environment was also noted by study participants. Finally, the search for meaning and knowledge about self in a new environment was central to the progress of the transition.

Summary

Military retirees found it necessary to alter their world views of work. Because they had been entrenched so long in the military culture, the only certainty was that they were uncertain about the future. The rethinking work model is part of the larger military retirement transition process. It presents a fairly ordered system for rethinking work, but it is also reiterative in its application.

There are two things that remain constant throughout. One is the propensity for change that engenders the very idea of challenging previous assumptions about work. The other is the obvious struggle on the part of the military retirees to maintain some sense of control during this phase of the transition. This theme reverberates throughout the chapter. It recalls a complex mathematical formula in search of a simple irrefutable solution.

For example, in order for the transition to move forward, the military retirees used personal values to guide their career choices to exert some control over their futures. They had no way to determine future outcomes of their choices because situations and factors were at times beyond their control.

Rather than devolve into chaos, the practice of assigning values added some balance to the process. As the military retirees encountered the various decisions, choices, and changes, they reflected on the events before them and developed practical solutions for dealing with them in order to progress through the transition.

CHAPTER 6

LEARNING STRATEGIES

In the course of the military-civilian transition process, military retirees faced situations, obstacles, and decisions they had never encountered before. In order to survive and invariably overcome these trials, the military retirees employed several methods to aid them in their retirement preparation. These approaches involved a concerted effort to learn and develop within the context of the retirement transition and therefore I have used the umbrella term, Learning Strategies.

Learning is an activity engaged in by adults to increase their knowledge or skills relative to their interest in a particular issue. Strategies are defined in part as "a plan or something equivalent–a direction, a guide or course of action into the future, a path to get from here to there, etc." (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 23). In the context of learning, strategies are the specific plans that adults use to achieve knowledge and, more importantly, deploy that knowledge in a way that will prove useful to them.

In most cases, as retirement neared, the military retirees in the study began to consciously use specific learning strategies to prepare for retirement. In other instances, some strategies were undertaken with no apparent forethought of the future impact they might have on the retirement transition. Both approaches indicated that the military retirees were self-directed in their learning experiences.

Self-directed learning theory is characterized by making decisions about what to learn, determining the specific activities for learning, and making explicit plans to learn (Tough, 1971, pp. 94-95).

As they left the military behind and begin to rethink work, the military retirees employed various learning strategies to move forward in their transitions. From a practical standpoint, the learning strategies allowed the military retirees to remedy any perceived deficiencies and position themselves for a future without the military. The three overarching learning strategies used by the military retirees in this study were:

1. Formal Learning Strategies,
2. Informal Learning Strategies,
3. Nonformal Learning Strategies.

The three strategies mentioned above are not meant to be comprehensive to all transitions. Instead they specifically describe the approaches used in the military-civilian transition process by the participants. Combs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) described formal learning as the educational system from elementary through university study as well as professional and technical training. Informal learning is categorized as an ongoing process in which individuals acquire skills and knowledge through their daily life experiences. Nonformal learning is defined as any organized educational activity outside of the formal system. In this chapter, the military retirees explain the underlying activities that comprised the learning strategies.

Formal Learning Strategies

Further Education

As far out as 10 years, military retirees began to focus on retirement. This usually entailed an informal assessment of their skills and abilities against second-career choices. Though they were confident of their military competencies, they felt this alone was not enough to allow them to compete in the civilian job market. The only solution was to determine and remedy any perceived deficiencies that might prevent or hinder their future careers.

These deficiencies or barriers are described more specifically as "negative conditions that might interfere with career progress" (Swanson & D'Achiardi, 2005, p. 366). Interestingly enough, the military retirees noted a positive as well as a negative solution to remedy perceived deficiencies. The method used by virtually all of the study participants was further education. This was seen as the simplest and most convenient approach to level the playing field with civilian job-seekers. Conversely, as the military retirees discussed their preparation for life after retirement, several were motivated to adopt a plan after they observed unsuccessful retirements of former colleagues. The two different solutions present an interesting contrast. Further education was a deliberate tool used by military retirees to enhance their retirement preparation.

The military retirees appeared to believe that further education positively affected their transition experiences and especially their second-career successes.

Fabian and Liesener (2005) found that the level of complexity associated with occupations requiring a significant degree of knowledge or service ability dictates the need for postsecondary education to counter the barriers to entry into the work force. This coincides with the perception of the military retirees. Those interviewed agreed unanimously that the attainment of higher education was the most significant predictor of success for the military-civilian transition. Further education in the context of this study is defined as any type of courses or program of study taken at an accredited college with the express intent of furthering one's education. This would also include the attainment of associate's, bachelor's, and master's degrees.

Further education provided the military retirees with a valuable credential to use in the transition to a new career. This seemed especially true if an individual had completed the requirements for a bachelor's or master's degree. It was thought that a degree provided the basic qualifications to ensure a successful second career outside of the military. Combined with an extensive and specialized military work background, a terminal degree was deemed necessary to enhance the employability of the military retiree.

Of the 13 individuals interviewed for this study, all had some college education in their backgrounds. Further education for those participating in the study ranged from approximately at least one year of college courses to the achievement of graduate degrees. One individual possessed an associate's degree, six had earned bachelor's degrees, and two completed requirements for master's degrees.

It is particularly interesting to note that though several of the military retirees had attended college prior to entering the military, none had completed requirements for a degree prior to entry into the military. This further highlighted the accomplishments of the military retirees in this study. Moreover, it emphasized the importance they placed on further education as a useful strategic tool to help facilitate their transition process. Further education offered the potential to tangibly augment their military portfolio in a way that employers might find attractive. Arthur clearly described why further education was so important to him.

> I didn't have a college degree. I was going to college, but I didn't even have an associate's. Now, I have my associate's. That's all I have; that's as far as I got. So I started preparing for that knowing I was going to need a degree because here I am an uneducated, intelligent guy. But on paper it doesn't look like I've done anything but high school and the military. And civilian employers just don't see that experience as being all that valuable.

Even though he had obtained an associate's degree, Arthur seemed to still feel it was inadequate to compete with his civilian counterparts. His statement seemed to imply that a bachelor's degree from a four-year college would really be the ultimate goal for military retirees. Similarly, John was convinced that he would not have been hired for his position as executive director of a nonprofit, military social services agency if he had not earned a bachelor's degree.

> Well, I feel that you're going to go out and get a job, to be marketable and you don't have a degree, you don't have a chance .... And also, having the prerequisite to be marketable was necessary. I thought I was successful in my naval career and having the education to back it.

In the last few months before he left the military, John frantically put together the credits he would need to earn his bachelor's degree. He was appointed to his position less than a month after his graduation and retirement. In spite of his sparkling career record, it was doubtful that he would have been chosen over other candidates without a degree.

While Arthur and John did indeed recognize the potential impact further education could have on their postretirement career prospects, it did not seem that attainment of a postsecondary degree was their primary goal. This was evidenced by their last-minute efforts to satisfy educational requirements. Rather, their primary goal was to enhance their resume for potential job opportunities. On the other hand, a majority of the retirees seemed to have further education as a goal early on in their military careers to fulfill their personal and professional aspirations.

The latter group of military retirees had aspired to achieve college degrees upon entry into the military or as they settled into a military career as part of their career strategy. Perhaps, because of their earlier educational background, as well as the plethora of opportunities provided by the military, these individuals were likely more predisposed toward further education as a means to enhance career attainment possibilities upon retirement. "Through a complex set of processes and interactions, high educational (and to a lesser degree occupational) aspirations enhance the opportunities an individual receives to acquired advanced education, which in turn, allows greater occupational possibilities in adulthood" (Rojewski, 2005, p. 147).

Not only did Tracy earn a bachelor's degree in criminology at the midway point of a 20-year military career, but also a master's degree in criminal justice administration a year before she retired. Like John, she was also quite sure that she would not have been hired for a production management position at a Fortune 500 company if not for her degrees. However, a bachelor's degree was one of her goals from the onset of her entry into the military. After a somewhat lackluster military career, Tracy committed herself instead to an occupational goal of becoming a corporate manager in the civilian sector. That would provide a truer indicator of her professional potential and capabilities.

> Nowadays you really have to be basically, no longer have just a high school degree, in my opinion, in order to be successful. You're just like run-of-the-mill. And not to say that people who have a high school diploma are run-of-the-mill, but if you really want to make a statement nowadays you have to really come with something more.

Tracy's inability to advance as she would have liked in the military contrasted sharply with her ease in gaining a civilian management position. It also seemed to underscore the importance of further education in the military-civilian transition experience. Once Tracy determined that her military career would not meet her expectations, she began to focus on further education in the form of a master's degree to further prepare for her retirement. She understood the value of further education in her particular situation. It is certainly doubtful that her background alone would have been enough to obtain the management position.

Like the others, Tom was very adamant about the role further education played in his preparation for transition. He too was somewhat disenchanted with the military, but it had not prevented him from advancing through the ranks. Throughout his time in the military he astutely managed his career and took only certain positions and projects he felt would give him the right kind of experience needed to obtain employment with one of the top management consulting firms. Despite working alongside civilian consultants on large projects in the military, he was convinced that he would not have been hired for a consultant position if he did not have a degree.

> I said I'm not going to leave the Navy without having the education credential which I was convinced that I needed .... It hurts a little bit, particularly to those who don't have it, but what they value if you put in this hand a bachelor's degree and on this hand 20 years of experience in the military, most employers will always go to the hand holding the college degree. And people may say that isn't fair and, well, you know, I've learned from the school of hard knocks. Well, that's just the way the private sector is. Yeah, I was absolutely determined to have that degree. That was job one.

Tom's statement strongly suggested that only a college degree would level the playing field for military retirees. Military experience alone was considered insufficient to compete for the most favorable jobs. Tom's comments also suggested that he had readjusted his focus to concentrate on his civilian career goal. He had worked with civilian consultants on previous military projects and it influenced him to change his focus in midcareer. In his mind and through his contact with others, a

college degree was his only avenue to attain his goal. Tom considered it the primary credential that would lead to the best second-career opportunities.

Like Tracy, Randy had also earned bachelor's and master's degrees while still in the military. However, unlike Tracy, he had a stellar career in the military.

> My undergraduate degree is a bachelor's in business administration and my graduate degree is a master's in science and management. I was able to complete those studies to kind of make me more marketable when I did come to that point where I was going to retire .... I was excited because I was anxious to push the formal education that I've acquired prior to my retirement into action by working in something related to that in the civilian sector.

While Tracy pursued further education that aligned with her personal and professional preferences for a career outside of the military, Randy instead chose to undertake further education that directly connected to and complemented his professional military career credentials. By aligning his educational pursuits with his military career, Randy, even more than Tom, optimized his self-investment (Gottfredson, 2005), provided a clear line of sight for potential employers, and set a realistic goal for himself. He felt this strategy effectively eased his transition experience and made him a more attractive candidate. This represents a congruence of occupational aspirations and expectations (Rojewski, 2005) with the potential to significantly remedy any perceived deficiencies on the part of the military retirees.

Having thoroughly considered the testimonies of the military retirees thus far, it would seem to be debatable that further education helped military retirees expedite and ease into their military-civilian transition. Still, what of those who did not

benefit from further education? It is just as important to examine the experiences of those who did not benefit from undertaking further education, especially those without a degree. Frank, a medical corpsman while in the Navy, was the only individual in the study who did not pursue further education while in the military. However, he still managed to obtain a good position as a security professional for a large telecommunications firm.

> I was one of the ones that didn't take advantage of the education opportunities that were available. I kind of, I wouldn't say shrugged them off, but just didn't really think about them, you know. Then you think about them too late. That's one thing that will help your transition from military to civilian life and that's education. If you don't have an education, you aren't going to get anywhere in today's world.

While Frank was still able to obtain a lower-level professional job working for a large telecommunications firm, it was telling that he was also quick to acknowledge the value of further education in the transition process. Even more significant was his confirmation of the value of further education to the future of the military retiree well after the military-civilian transition is completed. Edward, an administrative specialist in the military, was working toward degrees in computer science.

> Right now pretty much education. Right now I'm working to get my bachelor's degree and my goal is to end up with a master's. I want to have a master's in computer science. That's what I want to do. I figure once I get to that point, hopefully if I'm not too old, it'll be okay. I'll be at that level of making the right amount of money.

Here, Edward described the impact that further education would have on his earning ability. It is interesting to note that both Frank and Edward felt they had a limited window of opportunity to take advantage of the benefits of further education before age became a factor.

In summary, further education was seen by most of the military retirees as the primary tool to remedy perceived deficiencies in their retirement transitions. Specifically, it benefited them in two ways. First, and most noticeably to the military retirees, further education filled in the education requirement gap on their resumes. This was necessary to compete with their civilian counterparts for their postmilitary careers of choice. Second, and less noticeable to the military retirees, it broadened their military career expertise, which helped prepare them in advance for their retirement transitions. This second benefit really seemed to be the most valuable advantage of further education. It is likely that what was learned and practically applied in the military can similarly be applied to a second civilian career. That would especially be the case if the military retiree pursues a similar career track in the civilian sector.

Military Training

As the military workers approached the midway point of their careers they began to consider their future from several perspectives. The first perspective concerned their present career arcs. The second perspective revolved around the training they would need to further their careers. The third perspective was how

their professional careers and associated training might benefit them in second careers upon retirement from the military. As they considered those three perspectives, the military retirees formulated strategies to position themselves for the future.

From its boot camps and officer indoctrination training to schools that specialize in areas such as photography, computers, and medical technology to highly advanced curriculums for aviation and nuclear training, the U.S. military offers an almost endless array of nontechnical and technical training opportunities for its men and women in uniform. Upon entry into the service, each person is assigned a job specialty for which they will receive training before going to their initial assignment. A combination of on-the-job and formal advanced schooling rounds out the training for military careerists (Department of Defense, 2004).

Even with their extensive military training, the military retirees for the most part were unable to perceive the impact their military training and experience might have on their transitions, particularly in the area of second careers. In fact, they learned over time not to discount their military training as they made their transitions. Jeb's experience was perhaps most representative of the military retirees as they meshed their military skills with their civilian jobs. Jeb took a job with a medium-sized yacht-building company and may have best summed up the impact of military training in the military-civilian transition as he reflected on his transition.

> You don't know those things you know because you're smart. You're smart because of those things you know.

What this somewhat puzzling statement seemed to mean is that as a member of the military for 20 years or more, military retirees possess a wealth of experience and knowledge to apply to a civilian job. In other words, the military retirees usually knew more than they thought they did about how to do their new jobs successfully. Dick described how he found that he was already well prepared for his new career in organizational development for a large regional transportation company.

> When I started working here I thought I would be behind as far as business is concerned, marketing, strategic planning, management, leadership, that kind of stuff, because I thought I wouldn't know what was going on because I had been in the Army for so long. What I found out was that through osmosis over the last 20 years, I had business knowledge that I didn't know I had .... So when they started talking about things, for instance, we're going through [a] strategic planning project right now, and when they first started talking about strategic planning, when they started going through the process, it was pretty clear to me that they really didn't understand the process because I had been taught that process in the military over the past 20 years of how to do strategic planning and long- and mid-term and short-term plans; involvement with people and sticking to your mission and goals and objectives being measurable and all of that stuff because it was ingrained in the military. So overall they just gave me this really clear business knowledge that I didn't know I had until I got into this and found that the military and the civilian world are really the same. One just wears blue and green suits and the other people wear business suits. That's the biggest difference.

Perhaps because they had served so long in an essentially isolated culture, the military retirees had no real world understanding of how their military training would translate to potential post-retirement careers. Dick's transition was eased somewhat when he discovered that the military had indirectly prepared him for his civilian career. Though he had no retirement transition experience to draw from, Dick was able to capitalize on the transferable skills he had gained from the military.

He then only had to learn to apply his knowledge of strategic planning in his new role. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identified the ability to transfer previous skills to new roles as a key transition coping strategy.

Dick described how he was able to use knowledge previously learned in the military to his new role in the civilian sector. Transfer of learning is defined as the ability to apply knowledge or procedures learned in one context to new contexts (Mestre, 2002, p. 3). In addition, there are several specific instances in which transfer of learning occurs, including "near," "far," "low road," and "high road" (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). A "near" transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context is closely related to a different context or environment (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). For example, a hospital-based military radiologist moving to the civilian sector to work at a hospital in the same medical field would be an example of a near transfer of learning. A "far" transfer of learning occurs when the contexts are markedly different. An example of a far transfer of learning might be to take the same hospital-based military radiologist and move him to a job that requires him to be an insurance agent for a large health insurance company.

An example of "low road" transfer of learning is when someone who has only driven a car has to drive a truck for the first time. There is some equipment that is similar in both instances that allows learning to successfully occur. "High road" transfer of learning is using strategy gained in one context to learn how to do something entirely different. A teacher who has mastered planning special events for

the local elementary school might be able to transfer that planning knowledge to a new role as director of special projects for a business.

The ability to transfer previous learning from the military to the civilian work place would seem to be critical for military retirees on all levels. It is really dependent, however, on the military retirees' previous training and experiences and the new jobs and environments that they find themselves in. Ideally, near transfer of learning would seem to be the most desirable situation, but if military retirees fail to engage in all facets of transfer of learning, they might jeopardize their positions or face underutilization of their abilities.

Ron was also able to translate his experience as a military recruiter into a job as a recruiter at a hospital and then a hospital equipment manufacturing firm. He pointed out he was able to complete the responsibilities of those jobs largely because of his past military training and experience, which would indicate a near transfer of learning.

> I'm working in a field, for example, that is dominated by very well-educated individuals. This is one of those fields. But, I also find myself through life experiences and things that I learned in the military; I can keep up and even surpass a lot of the people that I work around or work in the same field. So I truly think that the military experience has given me an edge on a lot of areas.

Ron realized his military experience translated quite nicely in the military only after working in the civilian environment for a few years. A positive transfer of learning occurred in that Dick and Ron's previous military knowledge assisted them in learning another career. This can occur when commonality exists between two

contexts in concepts, principles, or skills, and as both individuals noted, the value of transferring previous knowledge that was learned in another situation (Schunk, 1996).

Further education and military training were the learning strategies most commonly used by the military retirees. This was perhaps because the two strategies provided the military retirees a clear line of sight for postmilitary career transition opportunities. Further education provided the military retirees with the needed credentials, while military training provided the necessary professional background and depth of experience.

Further education most notably was the most purposefully used learning activity. It was perceived by the military retirees as a means not only to improve their knowledge but to achieve their career goals as well as increase and leverage their marketability among potential civilian employers. Another reason for the high use of further education among military retirees may have been because of its accessibility. Through the military's Educational Service Office, there were abundant opportunities to enroll in local colleges or participate in distance learning programs.

As the military retirees progressed in their careers, military training appeared to serve two purposes for them. First, it helped them to advance in their military careers. Additional military training combined with a variety of progressively challenging duties served to give them a unique depth and breadth of experience to

transfer to the civilian work force. Even without a college degree, military training helped the military retirees to effectively bridge the gap and make up the difference.

Summary

It appeared that the two components of the formal learning strategy used by the military retirees were in direct contrast to one another. Further education was intentionally engaged in by most military retirees primarily for the purpose of enhancing postretirement career prospects. Conversely, military retirees mainly viewed military training as the primary means to advance their military careers before retirement.

Though the military retirees spent a large portion of their careers training for various general and professional military duties, they placed decidedly more emphasis on the attainment of further education as their primary formal learning strategies. They seemed unable to accurately ascertain what value civilian society placed on their military experiences. There was no clear means to translate its value. Further education had no such problem. It was perceived by the military retirees as a known and tangible commodity in civilian society.

Further education and military training seemed to be most effective when purposely used together by the military retirees to aid them in the military transition process. Military training provided the real-world and professional experience, while further education provided proof of intellectual ability and potential. The military retirees seemed to make significant progress once they learned how to

effectively integrate and apply both components in their postmilitary careers. This would imply that formal learning strategies have a direct correlation to a positive military transition experience.

Informal Learning Strategies

Negative Role Models

As they discussed negative role models, military retirees brought up three primary failings. First, they noted their colleagues' lack of preparation. They waited too late to get ready for their retirement transitions. No real plans or goals had been established. Second, their coworkers failed to focus on the right things. They did not consider where they would live or what job they might like to pursue after the military. They knew they had to retire but did not make an effort to concentrate on the details of life after the military.

This may have been because the military had taken care of most of their fiscal and material needs for 20 years or more. Finally, they failed to have the right mindset to leave the military. This was most symbolically demonstrated by their propensity to wear their uniforms on their off-duty hours. To the military retirees who observed them, this unwillingness to begin to wean themselves away from all things military partially led to their failed transition experiences.

It would seem that a more natural path would be to follow a positive rather than a negative role model. But not one of the military retirees interviewed

mentioned a positive role model as a retirement example. Instead, like me, they focused their attention on the negative role models they had encountered during their careers. Negative role models caught their attention in such a way that it caused them to think about their own retirement sooner than they might have otherwise.

As one of the military retirees suggested to me during one of our interviews, sometimes we learn more by observing what others do or do not do than by first going through the experience ourselves. This would allow an individual to consider and plan for possible trials that may prevent a successful transition later on. That is why role models are so important. They give us a glimpse of what we aspire to be.

Specifically, how do negative role models influence the military-civilian transition process of the military retiree? In answering that question, it is important to frame the importance, significance, and meaning of negative role models to military retirees in the military-civilian transition process in terms of:

1. Getting ready
2. Maintaining focus
3. Uniform matters

Getting Ready

The word "ready" was most often mentioned by military retirees in describing negative role models. They seemed surprised that colleagues had not thoroughly thought out their retirement and, as a result, were not adequately prepared

to react appropriately to the transition. This in turn caused them to consciously begin their own preparation plans for retirement, as Edward detailed.

> I really started thinking about my transition at my previous duty station before my retirement. I kind of just sat down and contemplated it. I think the major thing that made me do that was this chief that I knew out in Colorado. He had retired and he wasn't ready .... So he was going through some serious anxiety attacks, and I was watching him just break down. And I'm saying to myself, this is not going to happen to me. So I guess that was the kind of incentive that made me sit back before I came here on my last tour to say, you know what? I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to give myself a heart attack trying to figure out what I'm going to do in life. That's probably why I started thinking about it four years ahead of time. What do I want to do? Do I really want to go back home and retire? So that's what I did. After seeing him go through that, I said, no way. I'm going to make sure that I know at least two or three things that I want to do and at least have an out; have another option. If that don't work out, I'll do this. If that don't work out, I'll do this. I guess that was the major thing of watching him just literally fall apart.

Edward seemed stunned that someone he had looked up failed to make a successful transition from the military. This made Edward realize that the clock was ticking on his own retirement. So he began to plan for retirement by asking himself questions that would force him to think critically about retirement.

The consequence for failing to consider the time became quite clear to John. It amazed him that people did not seem to be ready to undergo such a life-changing event.

> Often people aren't ready. We'll speak of someone else who's leaving the military whose spouse does not work and they do not have a home, and they didn't really know what their future would consist of, and maybe they left the military before they were ready to leave because they were at a certain point where they had to go. Whereas, I did not have to go at that point. But if I

> had to go, then the Navy said you had to leave by the end of the calendar year, and you're not prepared, it is a very difficult transition.

The need to prepare for retirement and, moreover, the transition to civilian society spurred the military retirees to take action well before their transitions. Randy, in fact, planned his last few assignments as a means of gathering information to prepare for his own transition.

> Yes, the last couple of assignments before I retired, I actually headed up our administration and personnel department, you know, the payroll. As a result of that, anybody that was retiring or transitioning out, they were processed through my department, so by me being a sort of hands-on manager, I would occasionally talk to people who were retiring and try to pick their brain as to, are you ready?

For the military retirees, "getting ready" for the military-civilian transition process involved reflection as well as action. Observation of action or, more appropriately, inaction of other retirees caused them to consider their own respective retirements. This in turn caused the military retirees to take concrete steps to plan and prepare for retirement.

Maintaining Focus

One of the opinions expressed by those who witnessed negative role models was the need to focus on the right things in preparing for the military-civilian transition. There are many aspects of retirement that demand an individual's attention. These range from completing paperwork to planning retirement

ceremonies. With many choices to make in a relatively short amount of time, individuals sometimes failed to give due consideration to the most critical items until it was too late. Mark felt that some retiring individuals had little or no perspective of what really mattered in the civilian world.

> In personnel I used to see these guys sweat about getting all their paperwork updated and get all their awards and all their ribbons and all their schools on their DD-214 and blah, blah, blah, and I knew then, and of course I truly know now, it doesn't matter a bit. It means nothing. What really matters is how prepared are you to make this transition and what skills do you have and how can you communicate that and then succeed.

The obvious question is why would military retirees place such an inordinate emphasis on record completion rather than focus on the task of transition? While it is important to complete the administrative matters associated with retirement, some individuals instead focused on what was essentially of little importance to the civilian world. This would indicate that an individual in the situation mentioned did not "get ready" and so lacked focus as to what was really important to focus on. Edward related his encounter with a prospective retiree that is indicative of a lack of focus.

> He didn't have any kind of plan. He knew he was going to go back home to his home state, but he didn't make any kind of job arrangements as far as trying to scout out to see what positions were out there. He didn't have a plan of what he really wanted to do as far as employment. He knew he was going to have to work, but he didn't know what he wanted to do.

Randy cited a similar situation as he described a colleague's inattention to his imminent retirement and the predictable confusion that resulted from his lack of planning.

> And I've seen many people in that situation where they didn't have the foggiest where they were going to live, what they were going to do, what their family would be doing, where their children would be going to school. And then the spouse does go back to work at 20-something years, and it is not a good transition. Just helter-skelter.

The military-retiree transition process is complex. As illustrated by the negative role models, if a prospective military retiree does not get ready in the beginning for retirement, the rest of the process can easily become disorganized. Subsequently, as the negative role model moved forward in the process, the lack of focus could cause the transition process to become even more confusing and frustrating.

Uniform Matters

Some of the negative modeling cited by the military retirees in the study did not appear to be negative at all, at least not to someone who is not familiar with the military culture. But fellow service members could tell by certain actions of individuals soon to retire who were not yet ready to depart the military. One of the biggest signals was the wearing of uniforms. While service members are allowed to wear civilian clothes off duty, it is not uncommon for military personnel to wear their uniforms 24 hours a day due to extended duty.

In addition, military housing was a benefit provided to its members to offset the high costs of living in the civilian community. Military members may stay in dormitory or single-family dwellings on military facilities. As a result, it is easy to live a military life for 24 hours a day that includes off-duty time. Edward felt it was just such a cloistered environment that hindered his friend's transition process.

> When I was dwindling down toward the end of my career, I could see this one chief friend of mine, real nice guy, but he was in that military frame. He was the kind of guy that wore his uniforms all day long. And I knew, I said, you know it's going to be rough out there. And he didn't listen to me. He didn't believe me. A month and a half, two months later, he came back to me and said, Edward, you were right. He said it is hard. He said I don't have a degree, I can't even find a job. It's just that thinking. I've been programmed to do this for so long. That's a part of it.

Edward implied that wearing the uniform in off duty-hours is an outward sign of those unprepared to make the transition from military to civilian. Just as the term "thinking outside of the box" suggests a departure from the ordinary way of perceiving things, thinking outside of the military calls for individuals to begin to conceptualize life apart from the military. In their study on role theory, Taylor Carter and Cook (1995) found that preretirement work or social relationships, behaviors, and activities influenced the retirement transition experience. Because the military retirees have become accustomed to their roles, the idea of doing something new could cause some anxiety and avoidance behavior with respect to the new roles. This could explain why negative role models experienced difficulty as they adjusted

to new roles in retirement. Edward gave credence to the role theory concept as he explained why he did not wear uniforms after working hours as he neared retirement.

> If you've got 18 years or so in the Navy and you dress Navy 24 hours a day, you're not going to make it. Or if you do make it, it's going to be real hard. You'll have a tough time adjusting to civilian life. That's what I felt. And it was real easy for me after my 17th year, that whole year just transitioning, getting out of the military frame of mind. After that it was okay.

Frank also felt it was important to draw the line not only in preparation for his departure from the military but also as a means of self-development. In fact, he seemed to place more emphasis on integrating into civilian society.

> I was out of my uniform and I was going home and I was going to be involved in what I was in. To me, I always looked at the military as a job. Because of the fact that I would go home and [my] whole life didn't revolve around the military. Whereas I've seen situations where you had people where the military was their whole life. Their friends were other people in the military. They didn't have any associations away from the military. I didn't choose to do that.

Negative role models' behaviors also had had an adverse effect on the family during the military retirement transition. Families were an integral part of the transition process and so they were also part of the military mindset. Negative role models were an active part of Randy's strategy for his retirement transition, especially regarding his family.

> I maybe spent, well I can tell you, maybe five years in Navy housing, four of them while I was in Germany and one year up in Philadelphia. The reason I was up in Philadelphia was just because the prices was just so high, I just had to do for economical reasons. When I went to Germany, it just wasn't

> enough housing out on the economy to do that .... I gave enough exposure to the military. I wanted them to know a different lifestyle. I think that kind of helped me with my transition.

Research is inconclusive on how marital status affects the retirement transition. Still, Randy's action suggested that it was better to take a proactive stance and eliminate any doubt. The examples of dress and living arrangements are tangible aspects of negative role modeling. As described by the military retirees, negative role modeling is more of an attitude. It is expressed in the lack of inaction toward future events. John provided a valuable example of negative and positive role models.

> Something else on the financial side too, a lot of military do not prepare themselves financially. They live in government housing and they retire and they're not prepared to purchase a home. You have got to prepare yourself in that regard. You've got to locate, you have got to establish some roots, because in the military you don't have roots established; you're on the move, you're transferring every three or four years. So if you're going to retire as I did, I pretty much established some roots by purchasing a home, preparing my family, establishing my daughter in school, my wife in her employment. That was part of the preparation for that. It was not just myself. The fact is you don't always know what you're going to do for sure. You have some ideas where you might be headed in your preparations, but you've got to prepare your family. You certainly, financially, have got to be established, somewhat, when you make the jump, the transition.

John gave a textbook example of what not to do and then provided a textbook example of what to do to properly prepare for retirement transition. Essentially, the value of negative role models is that they indirectly forced the military retirees to

prepare for their transitions. As they viewed their colleagues they were forced to reflect and respond to their own situations.

Networking

Networking is an often-used methodology of civilian job seekers. It involves relationships between one or more individuals to facilitate job leads and possible employment. "The purpose of networking is the exchange of information, advice, and referrals via the information interview process, to assist in attaining your goal of changing careers" (Helfand, 1995, p.203).

While networking is a common practice in the civilian work force, those in the military have little if any experience with it. A career military person may change jobs several times over the course of a 20-year career. However, because those job changes are planned and ordered by a higher authority, there is no need for career military to avail themselves of networking.

Consequently, as military retirees begin their transition, it is likely that networking is not their first avenue to seek employment. As mentioned previously, networks are based on relationships with other individuals. This suggests that a military retiree have an association with a civilian with a connection to a business entity.

Networking as it applied to the transition of the individuals of this study seemed to consist of several essential parts. These parts of the networking process do not necessarily follow a set order. Instead, some military retirees may have

experienced some or all of the parts in their transitions. If a logical order had to be established it would probably follow as:

1. Bugs in my ear,
2. Renewing contacts,
3. Experience required.

Bugs in My Ear

For some individuals, the networking process began sometime before they departed the military. In Robert's case, he made a conscious decision to begin the process of integrating into society while still in the military. By choosing to reside in the city and commute to the naval base located in the north suburbs, he began to develop networking relationships. It was then that his fellow commuters started to put bugs in his ears.

> I was getting people starting to query me about what I wanted to do when I retired and giving me the business cards and things like that, so that was kind of nice. I would commute on this Metra every day since I lived in Chicago, so I commute every day in my uniform .... Then after three years of me commuting in my uniform, they approached me about when I was getting out, about when I was retiring and what my options were because I was a veteran and retiree and so forth and so on. So they were already putting bugs in my ear. So that was kind of working out like I thought it would. And the uniform only helped me out that much more.

To put "bugs in my ears" described how Robert became aware of the possibility of networking as a strategy to obtain employment after his retirement from the military. Though his decision to live and commute among civilians seemed

calculated to ease his transition to civilian life, he did not appear to plan any networking opportunities. Edward's experience was similar to Robert's in that he also had a "bug in his ear." Except in his case, the "bug" was from a former military coworker.

> I kept in contact with Russ most of the time and he'd been talking to me. When I first retired, he was at my retirement and talking to me asking, "do you really want to do this?" I think he had doubts in his mind about going to own a business, definitely an automotive business. I think he knew how hard it was going to be and how much time it was going to consume. He had retired long before me, and he had been out here, and got kind of a flavor of what was going on. He kind of put a bug in my ear on retirement.

At first glance, this type of networking may seem insignificant because of its incidental nature. But without knowledge of how the civilian world works, "bugs in the ear" provide a tangible foundation for a military retiree to begin to learn the art of networking.

Renewing Contacts

Edward's reunion with his former military friend also demonstrated how most military make first contact in the pursuit of civilian employment–through existing relationships with other military. This would seem to be a natural first step given the isolated world of the military. Frank described his strategy by calling on those he knew who might be provide avenues to employment opportunities.

> Once I had made the decision to get out and I decided how much money I needed to make to support the lifestyle that I felt we needed to elevate to, the

> action steps that I took were I insured that I had my documentation of my past experiences and all of that. I made sure that I renewed contacts with people that I had met throughout the years that I felt may be in a position to help me advance my goals. I had made contacts with people that I had met that I thought had the lifestyle that I wanted to have.

It is not clear if all the contacts Frank referred to were military-related. What is apparent is that those contacts were made during his career in the military and it is therefore logical to assume that many if not most of those relationships were with individuals who had previously left military service. Arthur cited a similar approach to networking. The exception was that his networking occurred within his immediate scope of work.

To network effectively, you must contact friends and acquaintances to obtain information about job openings (Saks, 2005). While Dick did not specifically use a military contact per se to acquire part-time work as an adjunct professor at an urban university, his network still had it roots in the military community.

> The one at State, the way I got turned onto the position at State is that I had a professor in my undergraduate course, Fletcher Jefferson, he's not much older than I am. I think he's like 41 or 42. He's got his Ph.D. in training and development. He was [my] professor, he was in the administrative program at Great Lakes and I kind of kept in touch with him. So when I graduated and got this job here at Pace, he moved to Roosevelt and I went down there and talked to him one day and he said, they're looking for faculty members and I told Marie, the person in charge of that particular program, that you'd be available. Why don't you give me your resume, give me your card. So I gave him the card and it was, like, immediate.

Experience Required

At his last duty station, Arthur was a medical staff administrator at a large, regional naval reserve training command. In this role he was primarily responsible for ensuring that naval reserve hospital commands received the proper training to maintain readiness in case they were called to active duty. He worked for a naval reservist who was also a manager at a large health insurance company. She knew of a manager in another area who was looking for a health care representative. By chance, the hiring manager had previously served on active duty in the same medical facility as Arthur and was familiar with his work and abilities. As a result he was offered the position.

> She was looking for this depth of experience to get in the position I'm in. I know she would have bias towards somebody in my position. There's just no way she couldn't. So it's worked out really good for me and it's kind of like coming home.

Tom engaged in a dual networking strategy to achieve his goal of working with a major management consulting firm. He took advantage not only of his military contacts but, like Dick, also leveraged his association with the on-site university he attended on a part-time basis.

> I started really trying to do some networking in this area trying to figure out what's around and so forth. I learned a lot about companies here and actually that time with [the university] wasn't bad in terms of being exposed to some of the local companies, organizations. There were a couple of internships and I think they realize, I'm not sure whether it's deliberate or not, they enabled people in that program to kind of get a taste of what's out there. I

> was doing a lot of work on my own, anyway. Actually, it's funny, I remember sending you my resume and you passed it on and the next thing was that leads to an offer, you know.

Ultimately, the contacts Tom made were instrumental in the procurement of employment, but it is doubtful that without the requisite background and experience that he would have been considered for the position. Undoubtedly, a network is not beneficial for either party if both and, in particular, the party seeking a job, does not bring something to the table in the way of qualifications. For the transitioning veteran, the requisite background is sometimes military, as in Carl's account.

> The company I worked with after I got out was with Fed Ex and it was really through a subcontract. We had a contract with Fed Ex, but that was one of those companies that was started by military people so they knew military background, they knew the discipline and study like that, so it was like, hey that's fine. This job was founded by people in the military and had transitioned out. We banded, started a corporation and started like that. My boss is ex-military so this is how it is.

The military retirees effectively used networking to obtain employment. It was not surprising that most of their contacts came from military-related individuals or organizations. This may suggest either an uncommon interdependency among the military or lack of knowledge on how to develop a wider network.

Summary

The informal learning strategies of negative role models and networking presented a more natural set of tools for the military retirees to use in the transition.

Negative role models served as powerful learning tools for the military retirees. They were the beneficiaries of observing the real-life role play of military individuals who preceded them in retirement. This gave them the advantage of thinking through their retirement transition in advance. A helpful outcome of this strategy was that they did not have to undergo counseling sessions or behavioral intervention to correct unpleasant transition experiences (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

From a practical standpoint, negative role models may have made the most impact on the military retirees. Their reactions to their colleagues' plights could be described as shocked, appalled, and dismayed. They were shocked because in many cases, these same negative role models had previously been positive role models to the military retirees. They were appalled because they could not understand why the negative role models could not discern how their actions or inactions translated into poor transitions. They were distressed because they felt it could easily happen to them if they neglected the same things.

In essence, negative role models caused the military retirees to "grow up" in planning their own retirement transition. Perhaps more than any other learning strategy, negative role models accelerated the transition process for the military retirees. As they learned what not to do, they also learned to pay particular attention to the small things that might derail them from a successful transition.

The military retirees also did not have experience with networking as it related to military transition. They did not appear to have a knack for the practice of

looking for jobs through acquaintances, but that did not prevent them from having success. In fact, they seemed to have more success networking when it was incidental rather than intentional.

An assumption could be made that the military retirees were able to successfully network because of their experiences in the military. To begin with, they all had served more than 20 years in the military. Also, most had served in several different domestic and international locations. This would require an ability to develop relationships with a diverse array of people. The only negative aspect would be that most of their contacts were with military individuals. However, there are many military retirees and reservists who preceded the study participants into civilian society. In many ways, these circumstances predetermined the network for them.

Nonformal Learning Strategies

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

The federally mandated Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was begun to provide transition services for individuals who leave the military. This constitutes services both prior to and after military service is completed. As the program had direct relevance for the military-civilian transition process, it was included as a necessary part of this study.

The various military branches offer a diverse range of voluntary education programs ranging from tuition assistance, high school equivalence, off-duty and full-time college, and extension and distance learning options. The military-run Educational Service Offices administers these programs and also provides testing and assessment services (Veeman & Singer, 1989).

The military buildup initiated and implemented by President Reagan in the 1980s ended with the demise of the Soviet Union, and subsequently, the Cold War. With no tangible military threat on the horizon, in 1988 the military formulated a 10-year plan to begin an extensive downsizing of military personnel and facilities. To ease the transition for those forced to leave, the Department of Defense (DOD) in combination with the Department of Labor (DOL), created the Transition Assistance Management Program (Chief of Naval Operations Instruction, 1993) or what is commonly known as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

In conjunction with the DOL and Veterans Affairs (VA), the DOD's transition support services provides $40 million annually to help service members find civilian jobs (Barrett, 1997). The services include counseling, computer job search, career fairs, and workshops on interviewing and resume writing. The Transition Assistance Management Program division was implemented to specifically facilitate the military-to-civilian career transition through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).

The Transition Assistance Program is instituted at major military installations in the United States and abroad. It was begun as an effort to counter the military's

period of downsizing from a high of 2.1 million in the military in the late 80s to 1.6 million by 1995. "The United States military has plans to decrease its active duty personnel by approximately 500,000 (or 22%) between 1989 and 1995" (Beland, 1992, p. 410).

The Transition Assistance Program initially began as an outplacement program for military employees displaced as a result of the military-wide downsizing begun in the late 80s and concluding in 1996. The reasoning was since downsizing had concluded, there was no longer a need for the program. Current research on the feasibility of the military's transition programs was found to be inconclusive at best.

As a mandatory program for those leaving due to completion of contractual obligations or retirements, all study respondents attended a workshop within six months of their departure. A TAP workshop lasts three days. The workshop curriculum consists of the following sections:

1. Personal Appraisal–skill, work and educational experience
2. Career Decisions–identification of career goals
3. Applying for the Job–job search skills, including resume writing
4. The Interview–explanation of interview process and necessary skills
5. Job Offers–methods to evaluate and respond to job offers
6. Support and Assistance–available veteran programs and benefits
7. Department of Defense Operation Transition–preseparation counseling

The Transition Assistance Program program coordinators facilitate the course through a combination of lectures, videos, group and individual exercises, and guest

speakers from the military as well as various industries. The classes, which are also open to spouses, are fairly large, with anywhere from 35-50 individuals in attendance. The course culminates in simulated interview sessions in which attendees' performances are evaluated. After the classroom workshop ends, departing veterans are free to access the TAP job bulletin boards and databases as well as other transition resources.

The primary purpose of the TAP to the military retiree is to provide the necessary training, information, and tools to facilitate the military-civilian transition. Apart from the Congressional Review article noted earlier, not much has been done in the way of a comprehensive, quantitative review of the program. A more direct approach to measure success would involve a survey to determine the value of the TAP in obtaining employment.

Though not one of the fundamental research questions of this study, respondents were polled to offer their opinion on the usefulness of the TAP in their transition process. Their responses were mixed at best, with some enthusiastically endorsing the program while others questioned its relevancy to the real world. No one felt that the program should end, rather that improvements could and should be made to reflect the real world. Tracy's response was typical in that she noted some good and bad aspects of the program.

> They really like stressed things like you should only wear a skirt. So like on all my interviews I wore, like, skirts. Then that's not always true because you can wear pants too. As long as it's business and you're business-appropriate, so some of the things they do tell you--going back to the

> resumes--they told us, you know, at the bottom where you put references something like available or something like per request? You don't really need that. That's like implied that you have a work history. We can get references and so it's little things like that. It was good, but they need some improvement .... They had like mock interviews, but to me their mock interviews weren't really realistic. It really didn't prepare you. The only way I would say that something can prepare you is that you get out there and do it. Then the way they would tell you how to write your resume, they kind of kept it towards military. Like putting your awards on there, if you're not familiar--they could care less about what awards you received, so I guess you have to apply some common sense and talk to people who have really been out there where they can give you more feedback as to what's realistic.

For Tracy, much of the information provided in the TAP was dated and did not have relevance for her civilian job search. In the military she felt prepared for every situation because of her extensive training, but in the civilian world she felt unprepared because she had worn a dress to an interview when a pants suit would have also been appropriate.

Despite his studious approach to applying the job search instruction he received through the TAP, Jeb managed to secure civilian employment with little help from the lessons he learned from the TAP. Rather than expressing disillusionment or disappointment, he seemed more surprised than anything by the realities of the civilian hiring process. His reaction to this situation hinted at the cultural gulf between the military and civilian worlds.

> You know, I had read those books, been to the TAP class, and I had done all that stuff. I went out and bought two new suits and I didn't need any of that. It just so happened that the guy that wanted to hire me didn't care about all that stuff. I wore a suit, but he probably didn't care.

Jeb also learned that civilian life is not as ordered as what he had come to expect in the military. In the military, appearance is an important measure of one's overall worth. Perhaps Jeb followed the TAP formula so carefully because of this. What he learned is that in the civilian world personal appearance does not always reflect the content of one's character or experience. On the other hand, Harry found most of what he learned in the TAP was helpful in his ongoing job search. He, more than the others, enthusiastically shared his views about how he hoped to translate the course material into finding the right career.

> What I learned in TAP was quantifying money, time, and resources. It was shown to me that in each one of those areas, whatever bullet you typed, make sure it's quantitative. It was funny. I was talking to Jones--he hires people--and he just said the same word, make sure it's quantitative, that you can save money, time, and resources for the company.

Harry had become fascinated by the job search process. He felt sure that what he had learned would give him an edge in the job market. This was further validated by Harry's friend in human resources. That confirmation only made him even more eager to test this new knowledge in the job market. Because of his experience, Harry found the TAP to be particularly satisfying though he had not yet obtained his job of choice. Robert also found the TAP helpful even though he managed to obtain employment by other means.

> When I went through TAP it was good because it got me to start getting my resume and get it out there on the street, but I never got to do one interview .... Yeah, TAP was helpful. Like I said, in this situation, this job landed in my lap. Was I ready to do interviews? Yes, ready as anyone else. I never

> held down a second job when I was in the military. Not one. I never did. So I never went on an interview in my whole adulthood.

Though he never had to interview, Robert seemed to appreciate that the program was made available to him as a service he had earned. His statement also suggested that the TAP had given him some assurance as well insurance if and when future job possibilities became available. This indicates that attending the TAP is not a short-term solution but has long-range potential to positively affect career prospects. Finally, there were those who were felt that the TAP was helpful but, like John, were unable to clearly describe the tangible benefits of the program.

> It helps. I'm not saying it was totally beneficial for me, but I'm not saying that it wasn't either. It certainly is a good program, though .... I think it's worth your time, definitely. You're never too old to learn and there's always something that's going to come out that will assist you in preparing you, and that's what it's all about, preparing you for your future.

John was unable to exactly describe how the TAP had aided him in his transition. It may be that he learned something that he did not need to draw from in his initial transition period. But, as he stated, those things he did not need earlier might be helpful to him later. The important thing is that he felt that the program had served its intended purpose, to prepare military retirees for the civilian world.

Perhaps the most interesting perspective came from Arthur. He was actually interviewed twice by this researcher. The first time was less than a year after his retirement from the military, the second a little over two years after he had transitioned to the civilian job market. His responses are notable for their contrast in

tone and approval of the TAP program. The first statement is his response one year after his retirement, while the second statement was given two years after retirement.

> The biggest advice I would give would be to go to TAP early and go again just before you retire. Go early to expose yourself to the things you might need to learn to be successful and then go just before you retire so you can remember what your benefits are and make the selections you need to make when you get out. Don't wait too late.

Arthur's second interview comment, recorded a little less than two years after the first, has an entirely different tone to it. Here, Arthur seemed to dismiss the program as meaningful only to those who had failed to do anything to prepare for life after retirement.

> For me it wasn't [meaningful]. TAPS is good for the average guy who plods along and then suddenly oh, it's 20 years, oh, what am I going to do and you know then you come and tell him you need to re-enroll for Tri-Care and you need to get your VA certificate for housing if you don't already have it and you need to file your DD214 with your county clerk in case your house ever burns down, you have it. But those are the kinds of things I do anyway.

In the first instance, Arthur expressed the same enthusiasm for the program articulated earlier by Harry. It should also be noted too that Harry himself had not been out of the military for more than a few months at the time of his statement. One could infer that both individuals seemed grateful for the immediate assistance and hand-holding provided by the TAP. The second statement depicts a more cavalier attitude--a sort of "been there, done that" outlook on the career transition process. It was as if he really didn't get anything worthwhile out of the experience at all. An

assumption could be made that as individuals progress through their transition they became more experienced and less dependent on early learning transition strategies.

It appeared that the TAP was seen as a useful tool by the majority of military retirees. This was particularly evident early in the process. Military retirees readily adopted the TAP information and materials, particularly in the areas of resume writing and interviewing. However, some felt the material presented was outdated and did not reflect the job market they encountered. This also seemed to have a constructive outcome for the military retirees. Even when the information was incorrect or out-of-date, individuals were quick to make adjustments. An assumption is that the program provided a means to measure progress. In the absence of the TAP, members would have to rely on their own experiences and familiarity to search for a job.

Summary

It is clear that learning strategies are critically important to the military-civilian transition process. Learning strategies were the approaches or methods chosen by the military retirees to prepare and move through their transition after military retirement. The learning strategies most engaged in by the study participants were categorized as formal, nonformal, and informal (Mestre, 2002, p. 3). It is interesting to note that the learning strategies employed by the military retirees in the study were decidedly intentional in nature. Many individuals purposely pursued further education as a means to prepare for retirement, the intent

being that further education would enhance and give validity to the resume of the military retiree seeking civilian career employment.

Military training served a dual purpose for most military career professionals with over ten years of service as they sought to position themselves for the future. As they had progressed in their careers, training had become elective in nature. This allowed them to choose training that not only would strengthen their particular military expertise, but also help them accumulate training specific to a civilian career.

As they reflected on the possibilities because of their retirement, they first learned how to understand and approach civilian life and work through the TAP. They had also begun to network and converse with others about second careers. As they learned more about prospective civilian jobs they made choices that would fulfill their respective career hopes and ambitions.

Even though most of the learning strategies were intentional in nature, the lone learning strategy that was unintentionally used by the military retirees may have had the most impact. Because of the uniqueness of the military retirement transition, no book or training could prepare an individual as well as going through the experience itself. The next best thing is to observe it in action. The military retirees encountered negative role models almost by accident or perhaps because they were a few years out from their own retirement. These negative role models served as a living example of what not to do in the military retirement transition process. Their

ultimate effect was to spur the military retirees to begin to make retirement preparations so they would not serve as negative role models to others.

The learning strategy which military retirees seemed most attuned to was further education. All the military retirees but one had taken advantage of further education while in the military. Most of the military retirees reviewed did not believe that their military background alone was enough to compete in the civilian job market. So they purposely used further education to enhance their marketability for potential employers. This culminated in the obtainment of bachelor's or master's degrees for several individuals.

Military training was the main part of the process that allowed the military retirees to specialize in a particular military profession even as military retirees positioned themselves for the future. In several cases, military training alone translated into civilian careers after retirement. Perhaps the most interesting point to note is that despite their extensive training, in the early stages of the transition they often lacked confidence in the sufficiency of their skills and knowledge. It is likely that this lack of confidence was due to their relative unfamiliarity with the civilian business world. Some military retirees did not come to appreciate what they had learned from their military training until well into their civilian job transition.

As they reflected on the possibilities for their post-military careers, military retirees turned to networking as the main tool to unlock employment opportunities. Usually in networking individuals seeking opportunities call upon other individuals who would have some knowledge or connection to job openings. Though they used

a variety of individual and institutional resources, the military retirees most often utilized people with ties to the military or the military itself to source job opportunities. In most cases, this less formal networking structure was more successful than the government-mandated TAP.

The subject of negative role modeling at first seemed to be an odd choice of strategy. Usually, individuals look to positive role models for examples of what to do. The military retirees for this study took different tacks, however. Their coworkers who did not have successful transition experiences made a much more memorable impression on them. In turn, their observations of their colleagues' failures caused them to begin to conceptualize and take action for their own retirements. They most often noted the lack of readiness and focus on the part of others in preparation for retirement. A telltale sign of this was in the wearing of uniforms in off-duty hours.

The learning strategies examined here are not unique in the sense that other cultures or societies use them as well. What makes them unique are the degrees of emphasis placed on them by the military retirees, especially in the continuum of the retirement transition process. The strategies seem to be equally intentional and unintentional.

A good example is how military retirees prepare themselves for the future. While military training is a core part of the military experience, it is not always leveraged to obtain the best or most career-compatible civilian job post retirement.

Those who enroll in postsecondary institutions later in their careers do so with the intention of making themselves attractive to civilian employers.

Another distinctive trait about the learning strategies is the high emphasis placed on negative role models. It would support the axiom that one learns more from mistakes than from doing things right. This is in direct contrast to the formalized TAP program in which the military retirees seemed indifferent about its value in the retirement transition process. This would suggest that learning is above all an individual occurrence that is most often shaped by the previous experiences of the individual, and the uniqueness of the events, as well as one's ability to learn and apply knowledge in a self-directed manner.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the significant themes that emerged from the research findings and discuss their implications for research and practice. Transition is a way of life in the military. In the course of the military career, soldiers, sailors, and marines move through several transitions as they rotate through job assignments that force them to move from location to location. However, the transition from the military to the civilian side upon retirement is unique because of the singular military culture that largely exists outside the rest of society. The purpose of this study was to understand the transition from military to civilian life.

Based on the findings, the military retirees appeared to have a strongly defined set of tools to help them traverse the various obstacles faced during their respective transitions. In order to discern the process evidenced by the military-civilian transition experience, a set of research questions served as the starting point for the study. The major research questions that this study sought to respond to were:

1. How do military retirees experience the transition from military to civilian life?

2. To what extent do they believe that the transition has influenced their values, beliefs, and practices about knowledge and work?
3. What learning strategies do military retirees use in their retirement transitions?

The findings of the study chronicled those events from preretirement preparation to postcivilian job adjustment. A basic qualitative approach (Merriam, 1998) using semistructured interviews of military retirees (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990) was used as the principal method to analyze data and determine themes. What emerged from the conversations with the military retirees was a set of themes that illustrated how they made the journey to civilian society. These themes have been ordered in a way that represented the experiences portrayed by the participants. The themes are grouped as:

1. Leaving It Behind
2. Rethinking Work
3. Learning Strategies

"Leaving it behind" captured the emotional upheaval of detaching from the military. "Rethinking work" explained how the military retirees chose new careers and the emotional adjustment that accompanied the changes. "Learning strategies" detailed the methods used by the military retirees to ready themselves for retirement and develop approaches to cope during the transition. Taken together, Chapters 4-6 give a clear picture of the various processes that were instrumental in the transition process.

Though the research yielded an abundance of valuable insights and truths about the military-civilian transition process, some of the discoveries tended to transcend others. So, the object of this chapter is not to provide a generalized summary of the findings. Rather, its purpose is to single out those instances that seemed to best exemplify the essence of the military-civilian retirement process. What follows then is a compendium of threads that integrate and explicate those processes.

Leaving It Behind

The phrase "leaving it behind" denotes shedding or coming loose from something or someone. As new retirees, the former military individuals in this study could no longer go back to their old ways of life. In order to move forward in the transition process, some things had to change. This theme directly answers the research question of "How do military retirees experience the transition from military to civilian life?"

The military retirees dealt with their detachments from the military on a variety of emotional and situational levels. Several found new careers in the military environment they had chosen to leave behind. Still, all found it necessary to make a commitment to move forward by emotionally detaching from the military. The matter of detachment was further complicated by three issues identified by military retirees as particularly difficult to reconcile. Those issues were uniforms, rank, and the loss of camaraderie.

In each instance described by the military retirees, the loss of uniforms, ranks, and relationships made the transition process more difficult.

> Every time individuals move from one role to another or experience a transition, they risk becoming marginal. The larger the difference between the old and the new roles and the less knowledge people have about the new role, the more marginal they may feel. (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p.128)

Uniform Differences

One of the main ways individuals described their sense of detachment was through the loss of the military uniform. Previous to retirement, it was something to which they had not given much thought, because uniforms were prescribed for daily wear. But after they retired, the uniform was the most tangible reminder of how things used to be. The uniform had set them apart from their civilian counterparts and identified them as a special and separate entities unto themselves. Now they were longer separate but part of the anonymous mainstream of civilian society.

The military is a very hierarchal, top-down, tradition-bound organization governed by strict adherence to policies and regulations in order to accomplish its mission to protect the nation (U. S. Army War College, 2006). While some civilian organizations may also possess the same type of structure and discipline in their approaches to business, it is not likely that the same amount of attention is given to uniforms, rank, or camaraderie as the military. Because of these differences in approach, military retirees entering the civilian world may encounter experiences

that are vastly different from what they were accustomed to in the military. McClure (1993) argued that previous social and military experiences put retirees at a distinct disadvantage when competing for civilian employment opportunities with those from dissimilar backgrounds.

When individuals leave one situation behind to enter into another, there may be some feelings of disorientation (Bridges, 1991). The study participants no longer would have to wear a specific uniform on a certain day or be addressed as first sergeant or master chief. However, if they still experienced difficulty leaving it behind, they may experience some confusion as they move into the next stage of transition.

Because uniform wear had become so embedded in the thinking and behavior of some military retirees, it had the potential to impair their abilities to take an unprejudiced view of civilian life prior to retirement. The military retirees discovered that while the uniform is not the same in the civilian world, there is indeed an equal if not greater expectation that individuals present themselves in a manner that is in keeping with company policy and norms. Edward, like some of his other colleagues, had looked forward to what he perceived as a more relaxed dress code in the civilian work force, but was somewhat taken aback to discover that, like the military, there were certain expectations there as well.

> You don't come in blue jeans and t-shirts and everything. And I think that's what I kind of, maybe, in the back of my mind looked forward to after retirement. I'm not worried about coming to work dressed up or any kind of

> way; just throw some pants on and a shirt and don't worry about it. I think that was one of the other "ah hahs."

Still other military retirees had different expectations for their transitions into the civilian world. They adopted a more formal attitude toward their upcoming retirements. Like the military, they felt they had to look their best in order to transition successfully into the civilian work force so, like Ron, they donned the more traditional suit and tie.

> In Korea my last year, I thought ahead. You know, I'm going to need suits. I'm going to need something to nicely dress into because if I go on interviews or whatever, I want to make sure I give myself the advantage, and so I had suits made over there.

This more formal approach to work attire was perhaps a less difficult transition for the military retiree because it was accepted as the normal civilian work uniform. This in turn offset some of the trauma with their departures from the military and entries into civilian life (Bridges, 1980).

In summary, the role of uniforms played an important role in the military-civilian transition process of the military retirees. Uniforms represented a tangible transition point for military retirees because they would no longer be required to wear attire fundamental to the military culture. The shedding of military uniforms signaled the beginning of the transition for many of the military retirees. This, in turn, forced them to consider their career transition process as well.

Rank Differences

The military and its members also placed a great deal of importance on rank because of the military's strict hierarchal structure. Service members are compelled by regulation to render hand salutes and other courtesies to higher ranking individuals. Higher ranking individuals are also assigned to the most desirable assignments, which also increases their status. However, once they enter the civilian work force, their prior military ranks appeared to have little to no influence. This would seem to be a natural occurrence, as most civilians have little to no understanding or familiarity about the military and specifically its rank structure. This would appear to automatically diminish any importance the military retirees may have previously held due to their ranks relative to their potential new status as aspiring civilian employees.

Role theory (Taylor Carter & Cook, 1995) suggested that certain socially prescribed roles such as a professional soldier or sailor are critical elements in the identification of self. The more entrenched individuals are in their present roles, the less success they would experience during the career transition process if the new role did not possess similar attributes. An assumption could be made that military retirees experience a sense of loss or disorientation as a result of moving into a wholly different culture with quite different roles and expectations regarding status. Arthur highlighted an example of how role theory was likely to affect other military retirees as he discussed the issue of pay.

> Actually, in the military, people don't even consider that because there's a pay scale and everyone knows what the pay scale is so you're looking at more authority and rank as a factor. Rank is a very significant. When you make the transition to the civilian world, rank is no longer a factor.

The rigidity and consistency of the military advancement system provided stability and served as a clear indicator of the pecking order among the military. With rank no longer the sole barometer for the determination of hierarchy, the military retirees had to learn how to use other means offered in the civilian sector to ascertain comparable rank. In their study on midlife career renewal, Bejian and Salomone (1995) proposed that retirees undergo a period of evaluation of their past accomplishments which may result in some reprioritization of their new careers. The challenge for the military retirees is how to reconcile this area without disrupting the transition process.

Loss of Camaraderie

Some of the most cherished items military retirees seemed to have left behind were previous relationships and camaraderie forged through many years amid a variety of challenging situations and environments. On one level, those relationships consisted of individual friendships. On another level, the camaraderie derived from shared values common to the military culture.

Military members work, live, and play in close quarters on a day-to-day basis. Long-term overseas deployments contribute to the sense of camaraderie. These shared experiences are difficult if not impossible to duplicate in any other

culture. Camaraderie can be characterized as a form of intimacy experienced by group members and "many different kinds of transitions can trigger issues of intimacy" (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman 1995, p. 125). It is understandable then that the leaving behind of relationships represents a significant loss to the military retiree as a consequence of the military-civilian retirement transition.

Arthur and Dick both felt the loss of camaraderie as they transitioned from military to civilian careers and found it especially difficult early on to relate to their civilian coworkers. They managed to offset this conflict somewhat by maintaining some military contacts in their new roles. Arthur explained how the introduction of a manager with military experience made his transition experience less traumatic.

> And that's why I really fit into this organization here, particularly in this spot, is because my boss is a reservist. You know, she used to also be on active duty here at this hospital so she's in medical service. She understands corpsman, she understands me, she understands the whole thing.

What the loss of camaraderie may really be associated with is the lack of empathy. Military retirees often felt cut off from their civilian peers because they often lacked shared experiences relative to work. The introduction or integration of a military element into the new civilian environment often served to alleviate the trauma of transition, as Arthur described.

> I went to a recruiting station to get a copy of the cards recruiters use to keep track of applicants because I wanted to keep track of the clients we work with and the way to follow up so I went to the recruiting station to get a copy of the card so I could benchmark it. And our change management consultant went with me, the woman that works with me just walked in and I asked for

> the card and we laughed and he gave me the card and [asked] how long I'd been out. I was talking to him about recruiting now and everything and we walked out. And she said, you know, you had an immediate kinship with those guys. You don't know them, but as soon as you walked in it was like you guys have known each other forever. And when she said that I thought, she's exactly right, because that's the way the military tends to be.

The military retirees found it difficult to detach from the military because they were so attached to it in so many different and meaningful ways. Living and working in the unique and relatively isolated military culture for a long period of time added to the difficulty. The importance placed on uniforms, rank, and camaraderie presented a challenge to the military retirees from a physical as well as emotional point of view. The military retirees recognized an unwillingness to modify their behaviors in order to detach from the military had the potential to delay their transitions. They found several ways to counter those situations. Rather than totally leave the military behind, several military retirees found it helpful to transfer similar ideas of proper uniform attire to their new roles as civilians. Additionally, many found that the introduction of an element of their past military experiences into their civilian experiences lessened transition trauma. This type of reflection and action allowed them to move on to the next transition stage and to counteract any similar issues that might arise later.

There is no doubt the military retirees in this study experienced anxiety and uncertainty in their transitions. This was largely because they were forced to learn how to leave behind most of what they had come to know about life as adults during their time in the military. The task before them was to try to emerge from the neutral

zone of transition (Bridges, 1991) as they attempted to reconcile their past lives with their present and future lives. The most tangible record of how they experienced the military-civilian transition can be measured through similar points of reference that exist in both the military and civilian worlds.

For the military retirees, those points of reference were uniforms, rank or status, and camaraderie or relationships. These subthemes not only determined what the military retirees could take with them on their transitional journeys, but also vividly described how they experienced the transition itself. More importantly, because of the somewhat unique elements of the military experience, the research serves to fill in the gaps and therefore provides a new and deeper perspective to the current body of transition literature. This is because the especially unique experience of the military culture with its deeply embedded traditions and regulations would be difficult to duplicate under any other circumstances. Consequently, the research provides a vastly different backdrop from which to compare and contrast other types of career transitions.

Rethinking Work

The theme of "rethinking work" dealt with how military retirees made choices about civilian careers, learned the customs and policies of the new organization, and learned how to adjust to their new environments through real-world experiences. The purpose of Chapter 5 was to describe how military retirees went about the process of assimilating into the civilian work force. This theme also

provided insight into the research question, "To what extent do they believe that the transition has influenced the values, beliefs, and practices about knowledge and work?" As they began to assume job responsibilities for civilian employers, the military retirees ended their roles as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines and became corporate and nonprofit administrators, managers, and professionals.

Career Salience

What emerged from this subtheme was the importance of the new career in the transition of the military retirees and subsequently emerged as the most important finding under "rethinking work." This may have been because, after the decision to retire from the military, the choice of a new career was really the most important decision the military retirees faced. Since so much was at stake, they placed significant emphasis on how they chose their various career paths. "Career salience has been defined as the value and preference that an individual places on his or her career and work roles in comparison to other life roles" (Swanson & D'Achiardi, 2005, p. 360). The concept of career salience seemed especially relevant for the military retirees because it helped to describe how they assessed their respective military values about work in relationship to their civilian career choices. This in effect provided them with the necessary linkages to make informed career decisions on the basis of their previous military experiences. This in turn enabled them to lessen the trauma of leaving the military behind.

An assessment of career salience is based on the following characteristics regarding the relative value of career as it related to the individual, other societal roles, and responsibilities as cited by Swanson and D'Achiardi (2005, p. 360):

1. Perceived importance of work and career in their lives
2. Commitment and values in different roles (work, home, community, family)
3. Actual time spent in each role relative to their values and preferences
4. Attitudes, thoughts, and degree of planning toward career and other roles
5. Job involvement (e.g., work as a life interest, active job participation, work performance as it relates to self-esteem, and self-concept)

Though all had relevance for the military retirees, the characteristics surrounding "Perceived importance of work and career in their lives" and "Attitudes, thoughts, and degree of planning toward career and other roles" stood out among the military retirees for obvious reasons. The military retirees had invested a major portion of their lives engaged in a decidedly career-oriented culture that placed a high degree of emphasis on the importance of work to accomplish the mission of the organization. To contribute to the mission as well as their individual development, most of the military retirees spent a great deal of time planning their career paths. As a result, these two characteristics of career salience were strongly represented by the participants as part of the military-civilian transition process.

Perceived Importance of Work and Career in Their Lives

The choice of a new career is a particular point of focus in military-civilian transition for most military retirees. First, the most urgent need for the military retiree is to secure employment after leaving the military behind, as Randy described.

> I think the most significant would be the career change because that's your livelihood, and it's different from what you had done prior to your retirement. At the point in the military where you are near retirement from a professional standpoint, you usually have your job down pat. You can do it in your sleep because you've been doing it for a career and you know ins and outs and how to get things done so it's pretty much second nature.

As described here not only is it vital to obtain a job, but it is more critical that, in obtaining that job, the military retiree maintain the continuity of a career because of the value gained from the military career. The military retirees had invested a great deal of time and effort to become proficient in their professions and this investment seemed to increase the overall value of their careers. Therefore it was important to maintain them by sustaining that effort in the new career. This urgency reflected the relative importance or value placed on the potential position by the military retiree.

Attitudes, Thoughts, and Degree of Planning toward Career and Other Roles

The level of deliberation and reflection the military retirees placed on their future careers also played a significant part in military retirees' ownership of their

career transition processes. "The belief that they own their own future and should construct it by choosing rather than chancing leads individuals to sense that they are responsible for their lives" (Savickas, 2005, p. 54). Even as the military retirees discussed how their values and needs affected their career choices, they made it clear that by becoming autonomous their propensity for goal setting helped provide a framework for career sustainability, as detailed by Robert.

> I went from the top of the list and worked my way down and if this don't work, I've got one other option and that's the federal government and that's what I'm doing right now. It's not that this didn't work, it's just that I think it's taught me to move on, move further up instead of staying level on the plane where I am right now. The only way that I can move up in this position now is with a different contract anyway. The contract that I'm on right now for federal supply is not going to go any higher and I realize that now.

Though Robert had already obtained a civilian position, it did not exactly meet the goals he had set for himself so he continued to work through his plan to pursue his ideal career. The planning and replanning process allowed him to exercise some control over his future while he considered his options. In a similar fashion, Ron felt that retirement was an opportunity to take control of his life and career. His positive attitude and work ethic along with a high level of preparation enabled him to make a successful civilian career transition as he shared his transition credo.

> Do whatever it takes to reach your goals because it's reachable. All they have to do is work at it. It doesn't come all at once. That's one thing they need to understand. Obviously, there's some luck involved, too, being at the right place at the right time, and networking with the right people, whatever

> the case might be. A lot of times I believe you create your own life, too, so the more you do, the more you create.

Goal setting helps those in transition to imagine a better future through conceptualization, choosing realistic possibilities, and formulating feasible goals (Egan, 1994). The practice of goal setting also provided the military retirees with a certain air of familiarity and a heightened sense of security as they went through their military-civilian transitions. The military retirees were able to continue their familiar practice of planning that they had established during the military to map out their career. Ultimately, as they began to realize their career goals, the behavior of planning and goal setting became reinforced as a valuable tool to navigate the military-civilian transition.

In this study, the theme of "rethinking work" directly addressed the concept of career salience. This concept was used intuitively by the military retirees to help them make rational decisions on the choice of civilian careers based on their values. In turn, this allowed them to develop plans that effectively translated their prior experiences to their specific needs and future goals.

Learning Strategies

The theme of "learning strategies" can be viewed as the operational aspect of the military-civilian transition process because of the nature of its definition. The subthemes found under learning strategies attempted to answer the research question, "What learning strategies do military retirees use in their retirement transition?"

Learning can be understood "as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12). Strategies are defined in part as "a plan, or something equivalent–a direction, a guide, or course of action into the future, a path to get from here to there" (Mintzberg, 1994, p.23). A blended definition of what constitutes learning strategies can be interpreted as the ability to plan how to gain knowledge of the future.

The three overarching learning strategies used by the military retirees consisted of (1) Formal Learning Strategies, (2) Informal Learning Strategies, and (3) Nonformal Learning Strategies (Combs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973). Formal learning strategies consisted of professional military training undertaken in the military and any voluntary formal educational programs. Informal learning strategies consisted of any structured educational process or program, while nonformal learning strategies captured any organized learning obtained outside of the formal educational system.

Formal Learning

Combs, Prosser, and Ahmed (1973) described formal learning as the educational system from elementary through university study as well as professional and technical training. For the military retiree, formal learning would really be concerned with two distinct aspects. First, upon entry into the military, formal training would consist of any military training undertaken to enter and progress in a

certain area of expertise. Second, formal training would come under any voluntary further educational pursuits outside of the professional parameters of the military experience.

Military Training

A vast array of military training was available to the military retirees during their time in the military. Upon entry into the service, each person was assigned a job specialty for which they received training before going to their initial assignments. A combination of on-the-job and formal advanced schooling round out the training for military careerists (Department of Defense, 2004). From schools that offered training on administration and basic seamanship to advanced courses on medical technology and nuclear physics, the military provided its employees with ample opportunity to master a career.

While it was apparent that the military retirees had gained valuable knowledge and skills in the military, it was also somewhat apparent that they were not as clear how their military knowledge and skills would translate to the civilian work force. Even with their extensive military training, the military retirees, for the most part, were unable to evaluate the impact their military training and experience might have on their transition, particularly to a second career. In fact, as Arthur learned in his new position, they found their skills translated well to the civilian sector.

> I thought I would be behind as far as business is concerned, marketing, strategic planning, management, leadership, that kind of stuff because I thought I wouldn't know what was going on because I had been in the Army for so long. What I found out was that through osmosis over the last 20 years, I had business knowledge that I didn't know I had.

Perhaps because they had served so long in an essentially isolated culture, the military retirees had no real-world understanding of how their military training would translate to potential post-retirement careers. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) identified the ability to transfer previous skills to new roles as a key transition coping strategy. There are several specific instances in which transfer of learning occurs including "near," "far," "low road," and "high road" (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). A "near" transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context is closely related to a different context or environment (Perkins & Salomon, 1992). For example, a hospital-based military radiologist moving to the civilian sector to work at a hospital in the same medical field would be an example of a near transfer of learning.

An example of "low road" transfer of learning is when someone who has only driven a car has to drive a truck for the first time. There is some equipment that is similar in both instances that allows learning to occur successfully. "High road" transfer of learning is using strategy gained in one context to learn how to do something entirely different. A teacher who has mastered planning special events for the local elementary school might be able to transfer that planning knowledge to a new role of director of special projects for a business.

The ability to transfer previous learning from the military to the civilian work place would seem to be critical for the military retirees on all levels. It is really dependent, however, on the military retirees' previous training and experiences and the new jobs and environments that they find themselves in. Ideally, near transfer of learning would seem to be the most desirable situation, but if military retirees fail to engage in all facets of transfer of learning, they might jeopardize their positions or face underutilization of their abilities.

Further Education

Further education was the most purposively used learning strategy of the military retirees. All of the military retirees participated in further education even if it did not result in a degree. It was perceived by the military retirees as the most valuable and viable means to improve their knowledge base and form a more practical perspective to increase and leverage their marketability among potential civilian employers.

Further education was also most likely to be used when military retirees' future career hopes were different from their current military occupation. A "far" transfer of learning (Perkins & Salomon, 1992) occurs when the contexts are markedly different. An example of a far transfer of learning might be to take the same hospital-based military radiologist moving to a job that requires him to be an insurance agent for a large health insurance company. In this case, the military

retiree might enroll in a business-oriented college that features insurance courses to prepare for entry into the insurance business.

Through Educational Service Offices posted on military facilities (Department of Defense, 1997), there were abundant opportunities to enroll in local colleges or participate in distance learning programs and benefit from tuition assistance and grants specifically targeted for military individuals. Still, the pursuit of further education was largely self-directed, with no specific coordination among military career counselors, Educational Services Offices, or the Transition Assistance Program. In spite of this, military retirees largely succeeded on their own merits. This could and did result in mismatched military, educational, and civilian career goals, as in Tracy's case. Tracy, a computer information systems professional in the military, earned a master's degree in criminal justice while still in the military, but experienced a lack of success in the military relative to her academic achievements and then experienced a revival in the civilian work sector upon her retirement.

> I feel as though that although I do have a master's degree in criminology, or criminal justice rather, I'm not really utilizing it but it has some doors to be opened because I do have a degree and I see now that once I am in a position I'm considering on getting another degree perhaps in management, so that I could be more marketable.

Tracy's experience would suggest that further education should be integrated more effectively from an individual career development perspective. The implication is that if further education is not incorporated in some way into the military professional experience, individuals may run the risk of being underutilized.

Underutilization would not benefit the military or the individual. Moreover, this could adversely affect a potential military retiree's military-civilian transition because of the lack of direction and true understanding of his or her skills and knowledge.

Informal Learning Strategies

Informal learning is categorized as an ongoing process in which individuals acquire skills and knowledge through their daily life experiences (Combs, Prosser, & Ahmed, 1973). For the military retirees, informal learning took two distinct forms. Networking, a widely employed job search strategy, was used by the military retirees to gather information and make contacts about jobs. However, a relatively new phenomenon termed negative role models played a significant and useful role in the military-civilian transition process.

Negative Role Models

The idea of negative role models would appear to turn the learning paradigm upside down. The use of positive role models in education and training has been a touchstone for how we learn from others. That is why the concept of negative role models has great potential to enhance the adult learning and transition literature.

Rather than look to the successful transition experiences of individuals who had preceded them into retirement, the study participants instead focused on the transition misadventures of military retirees. The failure of their unsuccessful

colleagues appeared to pique their interest because they were fearful the same misfortune could occur in their own upcoming transitions. The subtheme of negative role models was perhaps the most interesting and surprising finding of the study. It emerged early as a dominant motivational and learning transition theme.

As they discussed negative role models, military retirees brought up three primary failings. First, the military retirees noted their colleagues' lack of preparation. The negative role models waited too late to get ready for their retirement transition. No real plans or goals had been established. Second, their negative role model coworkers failed to focus on the right things. The negative role models did not consider where they would live or what job they might like to pursue after the military. They knew they had to retire but did not make an effort to concentrate on the details of life after the military.

This may have been because the military had taken care of most of their fiscal and material needs for 20 years or more. Finally, negative role models failed to have the right mind-set to leave the military. This was most symbolically demonstrated by their propensity to wear their uniforms in their off-duty hours. To the military retirees who observed negative role models, the unwillingness to begin to wean themselves away from all things military partially led to their failed transition experiences.

It would seem a more natural path would be to follow a positive rather than a negative role model. In fact, the modeling of desired behaviors is one of the methods used by counselors to support and advise individuals going through transition

(Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 196). However, not one of the military retirees interviewed mentioned a positive role model as a retirement example. Negative role models had a type of "scared straight" effect. The negative role models caught the attention of the military retirees in ways that caused them to critically assess their own preparation for retirement.

As one of the military retirees suggested to me during one of our interviews, sometimes we learn more by observing what others do or do not do than by first going through the experience ourselves. This would allow an individual to consider and plan for possible trials that may prevent a successful transition later on. That is why role models are so important. They give us a glimpse of what we aspire to be.

The primary value of negative role models as a learning strategy is in the real-time, real-world, practical feedback they provide to prospective military retirees. This enables the military retirees to diagnose their learning needs and behaviors relative to impending retirement (Knowles, 1984). The negative experiences of their colleagues served as a cautionary tale with very specific instructions of what not to do in the transition. As the military retirees incorporated this knowledge into their learning experiences, they also began to strategically reflect on how they would counteract negative behavior in anticipation of retirement.

The military-civilian transition process is complex. As illustrated by the negative role models, if a prospective military retiree does not get ready in the beginning for retirement, the rest of the process can easily become disorganized. Subsequently, as the negative role model moved forward in the process, it seemed

that the lack of focus caused the transition process to become even more confusing and frustrating. The use of negative role models represents a distinct departure from commonly held beliefs regarding transitions and retirement. This new development not only adds to the current literature on learning, transitions, and retirement, but also presents a fresh and practical approach for adult educators and career transition professionals to engage learners and clients.

Learning strategies can rightly be classified as the part of the toolkit used by the military retirees for their military-civilian transitions. The military retirees were faced with the dual issues of how to leave the military behind and to reconsider their values surrounding work as they entered the civilian sector. Through formal, informal, and nonformal structures of learning they were able to learn to develop the appropriate strategies to succeed in the process of transition. Military and further education, along with negative role models, provided both a foundational and unique set of methods to do so.

Implications

The goals of this study were to describe the process that military retirees go through as they transition to civilian society, determine how their values were affected during the transition, and identify the strategies or methods used to get through the transition. To do so necessitated an accurate and deep description of the military retirees' experiences that made up the process. Overall, the findings of this

study indicated several key points that have further implications for practice and research in retirement transition.

This study should prove helpful to future military retirees, the military, civilian employers, and adult education practitioners. Specifically, the study presented new knowledge of the military-civilian transition process that will ease the transition process for military as well as civilian retirees. In addition, this new knowledge will offer practical aid for professional educators and practitioners in the areas of adult education and career counseling who are interested in retirement transition.

Implications for Practice

In this case, implications for practice are made in the form of recommendations to ease the transition process for retirees. From an institutional perspective, both military and civilian institutions should be considered as adult educators, career and transition counselors exist in both sectors, and many of the issues affecting retirees are the same. This is also critical, as the study presented no evidence that any professional exchange or relationship existed between military and civilian professional practitioners.

In summary, the implications or recommendations to ease the transition process of retirees are to:

1. Integrate into transition programs and counseling protocol the topic or issue of how military retirees can begin to leave their past careers behind.

2. Incorporate into transition programs a section on career choice that features the use of career salience assessment methods.
3. Establish procedures to track and correlate prospective military retirees' professional and educational development to assist in second-career transitions.
4. Include a specific section in transition programs that models negative retirement behaviors as a means to prepare properly for retirement.

These recommendations clearly have the most immediate relevance for the federally mandated Transition Assistance Program (TAP) that was begun to provide transition services for individuals who leave the military. This constitutes services both prior to and after military service is completed. More specifically, the primary aim of the TAP is to provide the necessary training, information, and tools to facilitate the military-civilian transition for prospective military retirees. While the TAP format and content provide valuable reference materials and informational knowledge, based on the findings of this study, this is one of the possible areas for improvement. Still, these same recommendations can and hopefully will be included as part of any retirement transition program. This will be discussed in more detail below.

Integrate into Transition Programs and Counseling Protocol the Topic or Issue of How Military Retirees Can Begin to Leave Their Past Careers Behind

In order to move forward into new lives and careers, the military retirees would discuss and receive assistance from counselors on how to leave the military behind. This would not entail forgetting everything that was learned in the military. Rather, it would focus on how to understand the transition from the standpoint of uniform, rank, and camaraderie or cultural issues from both a military and civilian perspective. It is hoped that treatment of this topic in the transition program will ease the trauma and anxiety associated with transition for not only military retirees, but those who come out of similar cultural entities where uniforms, rank, and cultural mores are clearly indicated as a core part of institutional values. Those who most readily come to mind are police officers and fire fighters. This would create a more balanced approach both from the perspective of how similar professions face the same challenges but also from aspect of the emotional side of the transition process.

Incorporate into Transition Programs a Section on Career Choice That Features the Use of Career Salience Assessment Methods

This recommendation proposes to ease the retirement transition process through integration of career salience theory to aid second-career decision-making. This theory focuses on the value and preferences placed on career roles relative to other individual roles (Savickas, 2002). An assessment of values and preferences against roles are then used to make decisions regarding career choices. In particular,

questions for military retirees and those who come from a similar background would center on the importance of work and career in their lives and their attitudes, thoughts, and degrees of planning toward careers and other vocationally relevant roles (Savickas, 2002).

In this study, the concept of career salience was used intuitively by the military retirees to help them make decisions on the choice of civilian careers based on their values. This would suggest that a formal assessment tool and program that incorporates career salience principles could be particularly useful for prospective military retirees. The program would add a missing element to existing military transition programs and also provide needed direction and insight on potential career choices for future military retirees.

The information from the findings on career salience could be added to a career choice section of the TAP curriculum. The addition of this material would provide a pragmatic model for military retirees to make decisions. Incorporating career salience theory as part of a section on career choice into the TAP or other retirement transition programs would introduce a deeper level of understanding into the motivation of retirees in regard to how their values might impact decisions about second careers. Career salience would also provide a more rigorous structure and a needed sense of clarity to support the career decision-making process for practitioners and retirees. The expected outcome would result in decreased uncertainty and anxiety in the career-decision making process and greater commitment and confidence to succeed in new career roles.

Establish Procedures to Track and Correlate Prospective Military Retirees' Professional and Educational Development toward the Purpose of Second-Career Transition

Certainly, procedures already exist to track and record the career progress and educational pursuits of individuals in the military. It is clear that military experiences and academic achievements are taken into account at the onset of entry into the TAP. What is evident is that there is no true plan that connects the two processes to maintain continuity and account for any gaps in the career and retirement planning.

To counter these issues, it is recommended that the retirement process for the military be started at the halfway point toward retirement, or approximately 10 years out from the initial 20-year retirement gate. This is usually the point at which military individuals are designated as career military. In order to support this point it is necessary to point out that the majority of participants in this study began to plan on their own for retirement several years away from potential retirement.

Essentially, the goal would be to establish a comprehensive counseling and transition program. This would be a kind of flow-through process that addresses potential gaps in an individual's transition planning through counseling in a timely and appropriate manner within the proposed 10-year retirement planning time frame. For example, military professional schools and complementary further education could provide the precise formula to certain careers. Additionally, such a program may provide for some types of internship program with potential civilian employers

for "hot jobs" in the field of information systems or nursing. This would be beneficial to both institutions, as the individual gains valuable experience to use in his or her present position while also identifying potential applicants for positions in hard-to-fill fields.

Include a Specific Section in Transition Programs that Models Negative Retirement Behaviors as a Means to Properly Prepare for Retirement

This recommendation suggests that a section be added to the TAP and similar retirement transition programs to include a section on negative role models. As noted by the study participants, these were colleagues who preceded them into retirement without adequate preparation. Presentation of this element into the program curriculum can take many potential forms. However, since the behavior is based on the real-life experiences of the military retirees, a recommendation is that it also includes simulated role modeling.

Program participants would participate in a series of scenarios in which the main protagonist demonstrates poor or lack of retirement planning skills. These scenarios would take into account the entire spectrum of milestones and events within the retirement transition. For instance, one scenario may involve an individual three years away from retirement who has expectations of moving into a particular second career, but is on an entirely different career track in the military and who has not taken any further formal or nonformal learning to compensate for his or her shortcomings.

It is expected that active involvement would encourage interaction and allow participants to gain insight as they play off each other in different roles. Each scenario would culminate in a group discussion to identify poor planning skills as well as opportunities to insert good planning skills or learning strategies. This would not be pass-fail or a graded element of the curriculum to further encourage full involvement of program participants.

Implications for Research

There were two primary implications for research that emerged from this qualitative study to describe how military retirees navigate the military-civilian transition process. The first implication for research identified is the subtheme of negative role models. While research exists on the use of role modeling as a tool to use to ease the transition process (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995), negative role models are not highlighted as a major part of the research available as they are in this study. The use of negative role models was especially unique in this study because of the level of importance they played in the formulation of the military retirees' retirement transition planning.

Regardless of where negative role models were encountered in the military retirees' experiences, they proved useful in several ways. First, in some cases, they served as a wake-up call or cautionary tale for military retirees to begin their retirement transition planning. Second, depending on the orientation of the military retirees, the negative role models helped them to focus on particular gaps in their

retirement-planning processes. Finally, the negative role models presented the military retirees with an invaluable way to benchmark their own progress and success through the military-civilian transition process. For these reasons alone, the topic of negative role models bears further distinctive study to fully understand further implications for not only retirement transition but also as they might impact other theories of adult education including "learning to learn" and "self-directed learning." With this said, it is evident that further investigation of negative role models as a theme would only add to the body of knowledge on adult education.

The second implication for research is the recommendation to do a follow-up study of the current group of military retirees post-transition. The research would describe the experiences of the military retirees from the current study after they have had a reasonable amount of time to settle into their new careers. The research questions would follow a similar vein as the first study as to provide a method to compare and analyze similar data. The proposed questions for research follow:

1. How do military retirees experience the transition from military to civilian life?
2. To what extent do they believe that the transition has influenced the values, beliefs, and practices about knowledge and work?
3. What learning strategies do military retirees use to plan their careers?

In this case it would be interesting to note if any of the military retirees' values about knowledge and work change over time and especially the reasons for those changes. Also, as military retirees progress in their new careers, the issue of

how they apply similar learning strategies documented in the first study may add to the body of research in adult education, human resource development, and career education. Finally, a study of this type would not only be complementary to the first study, but would also inject a sense of continuity and completeness to both studies.

In summary, this chapter provides evidence that the study presented a rich narrative account of the military retirees' journeys through the military-civilian transition process. The study highlighted the three main phases or themes of the transition as "leaving it behind," "rethinking work," and "learning strategies." From these themes several subthemes that strongly influenced the process were uniform, rank, and cultural differences; career salience; and formal, informal, and nonformal learning theory.

As each of the research questions were answered it became obvious that an integrated procedure did not exist to ease the transition and address knowledge gaps in the process from an individual and program perspective. The findings of this research should provide practical insight to adult educators and transition and career counselors as well as future military retirees. Finally, the findings of this research may be further benefited and buttressed by a follow-up study of the existing study which could add significant knowledge to the adult education body of research.

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APPENDIX A

MAIN INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Main Interview Questions

1. Describe how you felt after retiring from the military?
2. How would you describe your transition from military to civilian life?
3. What significant events did you experience in your transition from military to civilian life?
4. What factors influenced your career and lifestyle choices? How have those choices influenced your transition experience?
5. What impact has your military experience had on your transition to civilian life?
6. How have your beliefs and values been affected as a result of your transition?
7. What strategies did you use to make the transition from military to civilian life?
8. What are some things you have learned about yourself as a result of going through this transition? What advice would you give others going through a similar transition?
9. After having gone through your transition, what would you have done differently to prepare? Why?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO SERVE AS A SUBJECT IN RESEARCH

Consent to Service as a Subject in Research

I _____ hereby consent to serve as a subject in the research investigation entitled **Military Retirement Transition As Learning.** I further consent to the audio taping of my comments regarding my military retirement experience as raw material to be analyzed as part of the doctoral dissertation of James Hunt. I also authorize James Hunt, as well as members of his doctoral committee, to use selected comments for the purposes of research, instruction, publication, or other educational endeavors. I understand that my comments, as well as any references to organizations and individuals, will remain anonymous thus honoring any confidential information.

James E. Hunt has explained the nature and purpose of the research procedure and the known risks involved to me. The investigator is authorized to proceed on the understanding that I may terminate my service as a subject in this research at any time I so desire.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant **Date**

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION LETTER

1534 Wayne Drive
Crete, Illinois 60417

INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION LETTER

May 7, 2007

Dear Volunteer:

I want to thank you for consenting to an interview. Your participation is critical to the success of this project, so I am deeply grateful for your help. I thought it might be wise to let you know in advance what kind of information I am seeking so that you would have some time to think about it. I am trying to find out how military retirees make the career transformation to civilian life. Because of your more than 20 years of honorable service in the armed forces, you are an ideal person to speak to the issues and processes involved. In general, I would like to know:

1) What you did in the military in terms of career and accomplishments;
2) What it was like to retire from the military;
3) What it was like to change careers;
4) What you learned from the experience;
5) Any other information you would like to share regarding your career change experience.

If you have any other questions regarding the interview, please don't hesitate to call me at (708) 672-0623. Thanks again for your support. I will see you soon.

Sincerely,

James E. Hunt